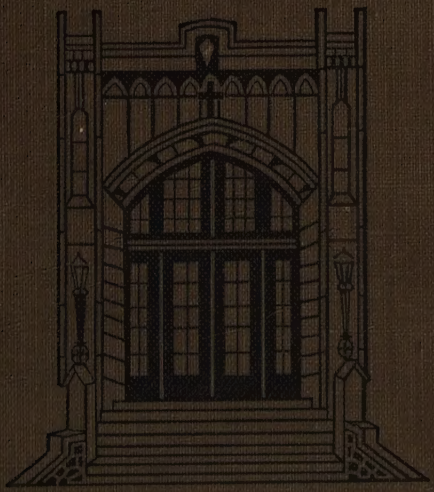
Chérie at Sacred Heart



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CHÉRIE AT
SACRED HEART

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A Sequel to "Chérie"

By
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CHÉRIE
AT THE
SACRÉ COEUR

CHAPTER I

Convent Girls

Chérie Lawson lifted the top of her desk and carefully placed therein her books and papers. A gaudily-colored calendar stared up at her; the small figures of bright red standing out from the background of purple, orange and green. It was not artistic, but Dot and Dash, the Brown twins, had sent it to her, and for that reason she treasured it.

"*Voilà!*" she murmured, tearing off September and its thirty days with a little jerk, "October it is. . . . Thou shalt fool me no more. To-day I had to erase September several times from my work . . . as though it would go on forever."

She smiled, and her eyes lingered on the word October, bravely facing the light of day. October! And she had been almost a month at the *Sacré Cœur*. Almost a month! Could it be possible? Time had flown on the wings of duties well performed and simple pleasures well enjoyed.

The afternoon classes had been dismissed and the pupils were forming in line to descend to the recreation room in the basement—which was not a basement in the true acceptance of the term, but a first

floor with cellars beneath; its doors opening directly on the grounds.

Chérie glanced across the room and motioned to her cousin, Nell Brooks. The girls were already on the march. Nell and she would be the last on line. *Hélas!* It was always so!

"Why in such a hurry?" asked Nell, joining her. "Anyone, be he blind and crippled could catch up with that procession."

Chérie laughed softly. Nell made such comical remarks. "*Eh bien*, Nell, but we might be too late for *goûter*!"

"How could we?" questioned Nell, "that seems to be inexhaustible . . . there is always some left."

But Chérie made no rejoinder. They were on the stairs now, and must be silent until they reached the recreation room where *goûter* was distributed every day at this time, a certain ceremony attending it.

For *goûter* was an institution in itself. To-day it consisted of great red apples and generous squares of ginger cake piled high on big platters, brought in by the sisters from the kitchens, and was as a banquet to the unimpaired appetites of the bevy of healthy girls awaiting their allotted portions.

Deftly and swiftly were each in turn served. Chérie and Nell were the last to present themselves, and the sister selected for them the rosiest of the remaining apples and the largest squares of the golden-brown cake. Smiling their thanks for the special attention, they followed the others out into the park surrounding the house.

"Well, my dear cousin," remarked Nell, "that's the time it paid to be last. . . . Just look at that apple!"

Chérie glanced at her and laughed. "It may not always be so, Nell . . . another time only tiny ones might be left, *n'est-ce pas?*"

They were strolling together under the giant trees, enjoying to the full their afternoon luncheon. Others were passing and repassing them in twos and threes, but the majority, in little groups, were laughing and chattering like so many magpies, eager to begin the games which always followed.

Over near the grotto, the mesdames were also taking advantage of the recreation hour, enjoying to the full the soft air of this rather unusual October weather, quietly conversing in French as they walked about, discussing their work and their classes.

But one stood alone, apart from the others, a slender, black-clad figure in the sunlighted space between two immense trees. She had just straightened up as Chérie's eyes rested upon her, brushing together her small white hands, to rid them of the soil still clinging to them, and a little sigh of content escaped her as she gazed down on the heaped-up leaves covering the rosebush which had been forgotten by the gardener. The cruel cold of the coming Canadian winter could not reach it now!

Chérie watched this nun with growing admiration. How tender she was! *Eh bien* . . . how beautiful! One might be gazing at some wonderful canvas done by one of the old masters!

And yet Ma'm'selle was old. Many lines crossed and recrossed the delicately fair face surrounded by the fluted white frill worn by the ladies of the Sacred Heart. She was the oldest religieuse in the convent. And why she was called Ma'm'selle no one seemed to know. Her duties were merely nominal—teaching the babies French for an hour or so in the morning, or making little crosses of colored paper, while *les petites* played about. And the youngsters loved her and followed her around the grounds, watching her as she cared for her flower friends. And she loved them. Even now, she was gazing at them, her age-thin lips

parted in a smile, her bright blue eyes filled with the patient tenderness of a loving mother, listening with the deepest approval to the thin piping childish voices. . . . As she turned away to join the others of her community the babies registered their discontent. But Madame Fargot shook her head. *Les petites* must stay where they were. They would be with dear Ma'm'selle in the morning.

Already the younger girls and the babies under the direction of Madame Fargot, were forming into rings, their pretty, shrill voices singing childish rhymes, here, holding their hands high above their heads to keep London bridge from falling down, there, dropping letters and handkerchiefs to their loves. Happy, laughing little ones! Merry and carefree! Irresponsible, beautiful youth!

Chérie glanced about; a contented smile upon her lips, her eyes shining. Pale sunlight filtered through the branches, clothed now in autumn tints, making the green of the grass lighter in patches, brightening the many colors of the dahlias standing so erect in clumps along the driveway. How she loved it! The beautiful grounds . . . the coloring . . . the merry laughter. . . .

"Oh, Nell," she exclaimed, aloud, "are you not glad to be here?"

But Nell made no answer. Her mind was elsewhere. All the laughter and beauty about her were relegated to oblivion, and even Chérie, for the nonce, was forgotten. Poor Nell! Again, she was at home with her parents in New York City; the petted daughter of the household. And again, she was on the health-seeking journey to the far western state to save her dear mother's life. And yet again, she and her bereaved father were coming back east . . . alone, bringing with them only memories of Robert Brooks' wife, and Eleanor Brooks' mother.

And the sorrow in Nell's eyes awakened memories in Chérie. Memories sad and sweet of the year almost past. And what wonderful changes had come into her life! What friends she had made since her dear father's death; since that terrible time in Paris when the realization of her loneliness and destitution forced itself upon her. Oh, how helpless and forsaken she had felt! How could she fight her way alone through the great world outside the few rooms wherein she had dwelt all her life; the only home she had ever known? How could she pit her puny strength against the onrushing enemies, starvation and illness, in the battle of life?

"And then the letter came from Aunt Abigail," she murmured below her breath, "and the check to pay my way to America. . . . "

All Abigail Greenwood's harsh treatment later could not eliminate the gratitude she felt she owed to her father's aunts. *Bien sûr!* If it had not been for them she would not have come to America, at all! And if she had not come to America, she would not have met Nell and Madame Wolfson . . . her good friends. What did it matter that Aunt Abigail had turned her out of the old Greenwood mansion; out of the very room her father had occupied as a boy? Oh, wonderful are the ways of *le bon Dieu*! *Le bon Dieu,* Who guards even the tiny sparrows!

"And Nanette," she murmured again to herself, "I shall never forget Nanette! How good she was to me! And *Monsieur le Curé* . . . still keeping dear father's masterpiece for me in his own house . . . that I may finish it, someday . . ."

A sigh startled her. She turned. Nell was still gazing out beyond the trees, a strained look in her tear-wet eyes; and gently, she touched her cousin's arm, bringing her back on the instant, to her surroundings.

Surreptitiously, Nell wiped the moisture from her

lashes, and glanced around. All were engaged as before, self-centered in their own pursuits and pleasures; and she knew that only Chérie had witnessed her babyish grief . . . and Chérie understood.

Chérie always understood. How dark and dismal the past few weeks would have been without her love and sympathy! What a solace she was . . . with what infinite patience she listened and advised; managing by her untiring efforts to show her cousin the silver, lining her cloud of sorrow. And now Nell felt within herself an awakening interest, and was conscious of something akin to her old enthusiasm manifesting itself in things going on about her. Time, the great healer, was forcing her grief into the background; making room for the happiness and brightness about her to creep into her life.

She sighed, and Chérie's voice broke in upon her thoughts. "*Eh bien,*" she was saying with a little pout, her gaze on Nell's very expressive countenance, "am I not worthy of an answer?"

Nell gave a start. "I didn't hear the question, Chérie . . . I didn't hear you speak, at all. . . . What did you say?"

"It was not a question, Nell. . . . I only spoke of the place," with a little sweeping motion of her hand, indicating the scene about her, "it is so lovely . . . so pleasant."

"Yes, yes, isn't it?" agreed Nell, her eyes brightening, the smiles again playing about her lips, "the trees, the flowers, the pretty girls . . ."

"*Voilà,*" interrupted Chérie, clasping her hands in her enthusiasm, "it is like a beautiful garden fête . . . all color and happiness."

"That's it, Chérie . . . one has to be happy here . . . it's in the air . . . everywhere."

"And you are happy, Nell?"

"I am," answered Nell, "I am very happy here."

A little sigh of content escaped from Chérie's lips. "Oh, I am so glad . . . so glad!" How delighted Uncle Bob would be if he knew! And Madame Wolfson! "You must write and tell your dear father, *ma cousine* . . . it will please him so."

"But I can't give all the credit to the place, Chérie," demurred Nell, gazing lovingly into her cousin's dark eyes, "if it hadn't been for your love and sympathy, the place wouldn't have helped me."

The color in Chérie's cheeks deepened a trifle, and she turned her head away. Praise embarrassed her. What had she done to deserve it? Nothing. She had simply followed the dictates of her heart. She loved Nell. It required no effort on her part to show it. She only expressed what she felt with her love and sympathy. It was Nell who was wonderful! Nell who had been so generous, so sympathetic to her unknown cousin. Nell, her best friend in the truest sense of the word! No, there was no one else in all the wide world quite like Eleanor Brooks.

And then, meteor-like, thoughts of that other friend flashed across her mind. Thoughts of Katherine Wolfson and all she had done for her, a stranger. Katherine Wolfson who had showered her with benefits because her eyes and a little trick she had of tilting her head reminded her of the daughter *le bon Dieu* had called unto Himself.

A bell rang out clearly, and the tinkling, silvery sound brought all to attention. It was the call to Benediction!

Immediately the lines began to form, the graduating class heading the procession. Presently, they would be in the study hall taking from their desks the neatly folded black net veils, shaking them out to place on their heads before entering the chapel. For, always on week days, they used the black, thus keeping immaculate for Sundays and Holy days the

more voluminous white net, lace-edged and fine, reposing in the various boxes in the closet.

And so Chérie and Nell followed the others across the park to the house. The great branches of the trees formed a canopy above them as they walked, arm in arm.

"Look at *les petites,*" whispered Chérie, her eyes on the babies, bravely trying to keep up with their elders. Their small faces puckered up with the serious business of making their short legs do double duty, wobbling about uncertainly when they failed in the attempt.

Nell turned her head, and smiled. What great little kiddies they were! Alone, in this great building among comparative strangers, living by rule and regulation. And the funniest thing about it was that they were the healthiest, happiest youngsters to be found anywhere.

"Are they not sweet, Nell?" continued Chérie. "I love to watch them; they try to look so big."

Nell laughed softly. "I must read the fable to them of the foolish frog who swelled with pride, that they may profit thereby."

"*C'est bien!*" exclaimed Chérie, her eyes twinkling, "tell or read the frog story to them, and they shall demand more . . . one story never satisfies a child."

"Then the punishment would be mine," Nell said ruefully, with a little grimace, "so I think I'll mind my own business, and let them attend to theirs."

"Oh, Nell, I did not tell you of the contest . . . it just came into my mind now," remarked Chérie, a second later.

"No, I didn't hear anything about a contest, Chérie . . . what is it?"

"Madame Travers told us about it, this morning."

"Madame Travers? Then it has to do with Art

. . . and I'm not in on that," returned Nell, with a little shrug of her shoulders.

"*Mais oui,* and we are to choose our own subjects for the pictures."

"Isn't that pretty quick work?" asked Nell, in surprise, "you have had only a few lessons."

"*Eh bien,* it does not close until the last of June . . . so I have time to improve, Nell."

"Yes, if you improve your time," teased Nell, "but you'll have to go some to turn out anything resembling a picture by June, my dear little cousin."

"Oh, Nell, how you like to make fun," protested Chérie, "and you do not mean what you say. . . . You think I am so wonderful. . . ."

"I do," assented Nell, approvingly emphatic, "but what is my poor little opinion worth? I don't know enough about it, Chérie. . . . How could I criticize?"

Chérie's lips drooped. She felt her courage slipping from her.

"Then I should not attempt it, Nell? . . . You think that?"

"Not at all, Chérie," contritely, "I didn't mean that. I am morally certain that you would be successful . . . that your picture would be the prize-winner. But it doesn't always do to be too confident. . . . Over-confidence blinds one to faults that otherwise would only be too evident to oneself."

"*Bien sûr,*" agreed Chérie, and her grip on Nell's arm tightened, "I understand what you mean! To win, I must study and work . . . and I shall win!"

"Bravo!" applauded Nell, looking gravely into her cousin's dark eyes, "I hope you do, Chérie!"

CHAPTER II

A Game of Cricket

The first pink-tinted streak of dawn stretched itself across the dull gray of the horizon. Through the small-paned window facing her, Chérie watched it broaden; watched the gilded tip of the ruddy orb appear; watched its rays shoot upwards in golden spikes, blending orange with the rose; watched the dun-colored sky change to a wonderful blue, flecked here and there with lace-like bits of fluff, opalescent-edged, reflecting the brilliancy of the glorious sunrise.

As she watched, the sound of Nell's regular breathing came to her faintly through the curtains, proclaiming the fact that her cousin was still peacefully sleeping.

"*C'est bien,*" she murmured, "it is too early to be awake . . . I would also be asleep . . . only for that dream. . . ."

There was nothing in dreams. What was it Nanette used to say? "Thou must not think of them, *petite* . . . dreams are but fables, and fables are lies."

But this dream was peculiar. Peculiar in itself and peculiar in the persistency with which it kept recurring to her mind. She tried in vain to keep it from her thoughts. She pulled aside the curtain and gazed in at Nell, blissfully unconscious of all around her.

"*Hélas,*" she muttered, "if I tell Nell, she, also, shall laugh . . . but then I shall forget it."

And then, quite suddenly, Nell was staring at her, blinking rapidly, consciousness dawning slowly in the depths of her large blue eyes.

"What's wrong, Chérie?" she asked, raising herself a little, a tone of apprehension in her voice, "has anything frightened you?"

"There is nothing wrong, Nell. . . . I did not mean to awaken you," said Chérie, contritely. "You surprised me so when you opened your eyes."

"Well, you weren't the only surprised being around here," returned Nell, stifling a yawn, "I thought something terrible had happened . . . but what time of day is it, anyway?" reaching for her watch. "Why, we have an hour coming to us yet. . . . What in the world awakened you so early?"

"A dream," confessed Chérie, somewhat sheepishly, "and I could not sleep again . . . it was so strange. . . ."

Nell laughed softly. She was relieved that there was no real cause for alarm. Anything as intangible as a dream could be disposed of in very short order. "And what did you dream?" she questioned, lightly. "You might as well get it off your mind as soon as possible . . . you'll not be happy until you do . . . so proceed at once, mademoiselle!"

"In my dream, Nell, you and I were together," she began in a low tone, fearful of arousing Madame Ouellette in the last curtained-off section near the door where she slept, with ears alert and one eye always open the girls declared, guarding and keeping law and order at the same time.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Nell, with a tiny chuckle. Chérie was a dear! She just had to tease her! She was so deliciously obvious!

"*Bien sûr,* but the wonderful part is yet to come," Chérie explained, earnestly, "I dreamed you and I were in a great place, large and high, circled about with white marble walls . . . something like an amphitheater . . . an old Roman amphitheater. . . ."

Nell lifted her head a trifle higher; the eerie ex-

pression in her cousin's dark eyes holding her gaze. This was getting interesting! What was coming next?

A sudden breeze rustled through the leaves without, bending the topmost branch of a great tree until it scraped across the window, making a sharp, clicking sound against the glass. Nell jumped and Chérie caught her breath. Both were startled, so tense were their nerves at the moment.

"Do go on, Chérie," entreated Nell, laughing, "or you'll have me seeing things."

"And all around the amphitheater," went on Chérie, "were doors placed at certain distances apart . . . large doors. . . ."

"Doors," repeated Nell. Really, Chérie was becoming dramatic, working up to a climax, as it were.

"*Mais oui,* doors," nodded Chérie, "and the doors were all shut tight . . . and above each was placed a sign. . . ."

"A sign. . . . What kind of a sign?" questioned Nell.

"A sign printed with large black letters, and from where we stood we could read a number of them."

"Yes, yes," urged Nell, eagerly, "and what were they?"

Chérie smiled. "By the strange way we know things in dreams, I knew that each designated the door through which we could enter into the realms of Art, Literature, Philosophy, Science," tabulating each on a finger as it was mentioned, "and then I discerned a smaller, narrower door, further away . . . and with difficulty, I read the word: 'Religion'."

"And it goes without saying," observed Nell, dryly, "that you made a bee-line for the door labeled 'Art.' . . ."

Chérie's eyebrows went up in surprise. "*Bien sûr,* how did you guess it, Nell?"

"How could I miss it?" returned her cousin, cast-

ing her eyes aloft in seemingly helpless resignation. "One must run true to form even in dreams . . . and now tell me which door did I choose to enter?"

"That was the strangest thing, Nell," faltered Chérie, "I had my hand on the knob, and was about to turn it when I thought of you . . . and you, Nell . . . you were just entering the small, narrow door. . . ."

For a moment, Nell stared at her cousin, in perplexity, and then asked, rather ungraciously, "What do you mean . . . that my choice was the life of a religieuse . . . a nun?"

Chérie nodded her head, slowly. "It was the crash of the door closing after you that awakened me . . . all trembling . . . my heart beating . . . beating. . . ."

"This is all nonsense," declared Nell, repulsing the feeling of awe creeping over her, "how could I?" She laughed lightly and shook an admonishing finger at Chérie. "You know what Shakspeare says:

> "Dreams are the children of an idle brain,
> Begot of nothing but vain Fantasy;
> Which is as thin as the air;
> And more inconstant than the wind."

So it behooves you, mademoiselle, to pay more attention to your studies and give your brain more work."

"*C'est bien,* Nell," retorted Chérie, "thou art so wise, *mon amie!*"

The first stroke of a gong boomed through the dormitory. It was time to arise. Chérie let the curtain slip back into place. Already, signs of activity were manifest throughout the long room, and the white curtains were fluttering in and out, as the girls whisked about their tiny quarters; dressing hur-

riedly; anxious to be ready before the second bell summoned them below.

. . . . .

It was a few hours later. All the pupils were now in the big cricket field, on the other side of the park, and the usual Saturday game was about to commence.

This field was used for all outdoor sports in their various seasons. And even during the coldest days of the Canadian winter it was in commission. For then the old gardener flooded it from the Artesian well in the kitchen garden, beyond the hedge and a splendid skating rink was the result, on which the happy girls flew about, their glittering skates flashing in the wintry sunlight; their merry laughter filling the frosty air; their gay-colored caps and scarves lending more brightness to the scene.

But just now, snow and ice seemed a long way off, and held no place in the minds of the assembled pupils waiting for the cricket game to begin; for this first Saturday in October was as warm and bright as a day in June.

A single sound from the small, square clapper that Madame Duprez held in her hand, brought all to attention. And quietly they stood and listened while she in voluble French explained the rules to be followed and respected throughout the game.

"Madame sounds quite reasonable," observed Nell to her cousin, "but it would be so much more enlightening in plain United States to me."

"*Mais oui,*" admitted Chérie, smiling, "and also to the others . . . and Madame knows it, but that is her little way to teach French . . . to add to their vocabulary."

Nell gave a comical little twist to her lips. "But how about the cricket . . . doesn't that suffer in the cause?" she asked, rather quizzically, noting the indecision of some of the players.

"*Mais non,*" answered Chérie, with the suspicion of a shrug, "that shall come later . . . a few games played. . . ."

"Oh, I suppose so," interrupted Nell, "not that I mind. I don't care for cricket. It's too long drawn out to suit me."

Chérie slipped her arm within her cousin's, and drew her away from the others. "Let us go over there, Nell . . . under the trees."

"But Madame will object. She expects every man to do his duty, or something like that. At least, each one is supposed to take a turn at the wicket. Not that I amount to much in that line . . . I last about a minute," grumbled Nell.

"*Eh bien,* Nell, come!" said Chérie, "Madame does not mind . . . the game is but another excuse to keep us out in the fresh air . . . to make us strong."

Nell glanced into the dark eyes on a level with her own, and a smile played about her lips. How could anyone find fault with Chérie near? Somehow, she took the sting out of everything. Was it just out of the kindness of her heart that she made excuses for all about her? Or was it a certain wisdom she possessed that showed her the good to be found beneath the surface of most things? Well, whatever it was, Chérie had it, to the nth degree, and carried peace with her wherever she went. Nell sighed. What would she have done without her, since her dear mother died? How desolate she would have been without her love and sympathy!

The cousins, happy in each other, were strolling to the far end of the field, when a shout from the crowd about the wicket made them turn in time to see a ball sail past them and disappear into the hedge, that separated the kitchen garden from the field. And almost on the instant a terrified, half-grown kitten bounded into view, as if shot from a catapult.

With a quick, dexterous movement Chérie caught the struggling little creature in her hands, holding it, despite its frantic endeavors to escape; soothing it, until it quieted down to the normal equanimity of a well-behaved house cat.

"You shouldn't take such a chance as that, Chérie," chided Nell, never over-trustful of animals, large or small, "it might have turned on you and scratched you. . . .Cats are spiteful."

"Not always, Nell," she answered, gently stroking the black-and-gray striped fur of its coat. "See, it is quiet now; and listen . . . *ron-ron, ron-ron . . . le petit tigre. . . .*"

Nell gazed down. The kitten was rubbing its head against Chérie's hand; registering friendliness; purring loudly. "It sounds like a corn-crake more than a cat," she laughed, "and isn't it marked the same as Billy-Jo-cat that the Browns had on the farm?"

"Ah, you see that, also," exclaimed Cherie, a surprised, gratified expression coming into her eyes, "I did not think you noticed . . . I did not think that you would remember the . . ."

"Why, how could I forget?" interrupted Nell, casting a mischievous glance toward her cousin. "Don't they look out at me from almost every page of your sketch book? Are you not always drawing a cat or some other animal on all the available margins of your books when you ought to be listening to me? And then you wonder that I remember?"

"*Eh bien,* Nell, how you talk!" said Chérie, flushing, "you know I sketch other subjects. . . ."

"Oh, I know you do, Chérie," apologized Nell, "I am only teasing you. . . . I like to see you draw animals or anything else . . . and I sincerely hope you win that contest."

"*Mais oui,* I shall try," declared Chérie, earnestly, "I shall study and work . . . and I shall win."

"Well, you've got the big idea, little cousin," applauded Nell, "now don't let anyone sidetrack it."

"*Non, non,* I shall do as I say . . . I shall. . . ."

But a shout from the players made her pause. The cousin turned.

"Come on," cried the girls, beckoning to them, excitedly, "it's your play . . . don't keep the game waiting!"

"You go, Nell," advised Chérie, "and I shall put the kitten through the hedge. . . . They have again terrified it."

"Very well," agreed Nell, "but don't waste too much time with it. You know how long I'll last at the wicket." She was eager to try her skill with the bat. There was a fascination about the game, after all. She wished she could stop the ball in the easy, nonchalant manner assumed by the more experienced girls. But of course that would come with time. She and Chérie were only beginners.

And as Nell held her bat in the approved position, Chérie forced the kitten through a gap in the hedge, and watched it scamper away toward the kitchen door, happy to be free, pleased to be again on familiar ground!

Nell's hearty laughter reached her as she turned to cross the field. Evidently she had made some kind of a wonderful play. They were all so pleased and her cousin seemed to be the center of attraction.

"Here's the bat, Chérie," said Nell, a triumphant light in her eyes, her cheeks scarlet.

"Yes, and try to do as well for our side as your cousin has," cried the girls, imploringly, "we need it!"

CHAPTER III

An Old Friendship Renewed

"Mademoiselle will find her friends in the cricket field, where the young ladies play cricket," said Sister Thompson, the aged lay-sister, still acting as portress after a service of fifty years. "Cut across the grass, under the trees. . . . Ah, you hear them. . . . They are still playing. . . ." And the smile on her wrinkled face broadened.

"Yes, Sister, I hear them," acknowledged the young girl, smiling also, as shouts from the distance reached her ears, "and I'll find them . . . and I thank you, Sister . . . you've been so kind."

"Not at all, mademoiselle," the sister deprecated, "I have done nothing . . . but go, if you care to see them at play." And she glanced kindly down into the sweet expressive eyes of the young girl, standing on the lower step of the white marble approach to the great bronze doors, now, wide open, inviting the October sun to enter the rather poorly-lighted reception hall with its stained glass windows and immense folding doors, closing off the parlors on either side.

With a happy laugh, the girl turned, and descended the few remaining steps to the drive, stretching like a broad, gray ribbon to the wide, arched-over entrance gates, through which she had been driven less than an hour ago. And gazing wistfully ahead in the direction from whence the girlish voices floated to her on the soft warm air, she made her way across the park; the still-green grass yielding like velvet, beneath her feet; the many-hued, breeze-stirred leaves

on the far-reaching branches of the giant trees rippling in the noon-day sun like waves of purple, crimson and gold above her.

She was not very tall, but her slender, graceful figure gave one the impression of height. Her hair, dark and curly, framed a face piquante and fearless, a fearlessness accentuated by the straightforward expression in the purplish-blue eyes, surrounded so thickly with black lashes. There was no sailing under false colors here! What she was, she was! She would always live up to her principles, and the wisdom of her disinterested convictions would demand respect from all.

Now, all this may sound heavy and dull, but there was nothing heavy, nothing dull in the makeup of this very pretty girl, attired in the most modish of blue silk gowns . . . the latest arrival at the *Sacré Cœur.*

Yes, this was a new pupil! "The loss of a whole month, mademoiselle," had sighed the mother superior, "is deplorable . . . and it means work!"

"Work!" she had countered, "I don't mind work!"

And Mother Vernet's glance of approval still lingered pleasantly in her memory. What was work when one had attained the goal of one's ambition? Wasn't she here in the *Sacré Cœur,* at last? Hadn't she dreamed of this moment, thousands of times? And to think that her two friends were also here! Here, of all places in the world! How very strange it was? She could hardly believe it was true! Still she was awake, wide awake! She couldn't be dreaming the same old dream over again!

"And everything is just as Mother described it," her thoughts ran on, "nothing seems changed since she was here . . . and how she loved to talk of her schooldays . . . of the mesdames. . . ."

She paused, her eyes resting in surprise on a grotto

built of brick, about half-way across the park. It was quite small, not much larger than the rustic summer house in Aunt Lou's garden. It was octagon in shape, and two large doors would open up two of its sides; revealing easily whatever was within. Strange! Her mother had never spoken of this! What could it be? And so piqued became her curiosity, that for the moment the chief object of this small expedition was forgotten.

She must see what was inside those high-pointed doors. So, up the steps she went, and peeped in.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, surprised delight in her tones; gazing with eager love at the exquisite statue of Our Lady of Lourdes placed above the marble altar of the tiny chapel; and the kind eyes seemed to dwell upon her; the sweet lips to smile a welcome; drawing her within the white rail, dividing the interior in half. And as she knelt before the altar, she read the inscription in gold, across the base: "Sacred to the memory of my wife, Elizabeth Parker."

"What a wonderful way to remember her," she murmured, "what a way to honor her . . . even beyond the grave."

And then from without came voices. The game must be over. The players, evidently, were returning to the house. And rising she went outside; scanning, from the top step, the faces of the uniformed pupils as they passed.

"CHÉRIE! NELL!" she called, wildly excited as two girls, arm-in-arm approached, "I'm up here . . . don't you see me?"

Chérie and Nell stopped short, transfixed with surprise; their eyes on the apparition above them.

"Oh, it is Betty," they cried, as in one voice, "Betty Desmond!"

And Betty Desmond flew down the steps, and threw

herself, first into Chérie's arms, and then into Nell's, embracing each in turn, again and again; mumbling unintelligible words of delight.

"But Betty, listen," said Nell, at last, "I want to ask you something. Where in the world did you come from? Why are you here?"

"*Mais oui, ma petite,*" chimed in Chérie, "I do not understand."

Betty laughed, happily. "Well, my dears, to begin with number one, I came from New York City . . . and I am here because my mother was educated in this convent . . and that disposes of number two."

"Then you didn't know we were here, Betty?" queried Nell.

"Not until Chérie's letter came a week ago," returned Betty, "and everything had been settled before that . . . but I thought I'd pass out when I learned you were here."

"It is so very strange," observed Chérie, still a little perplexed, "so very hard to understand, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Well, such things happen, at times," said Nell, "the world is a small place, after all. One meets one's friends in the most unheard of places, but . . ." and she turned her glance on Betty, "why did you never mention the Sacré Cœur?"

"Well," confided Betty, the color in her cheeks deepening, "I didn't have much hope of getting here, as things were at home . . . it cost so much to put Gerald through, and they thought his expenses would be even heavier this year; when lo and behold, himself was appointed interne or something at a good salary and, as Father said, the situation was relieved . . . and I am getting my chance."

"*C'est bien,*" cried Chérie, "she deserves it, Nell, *n'est-ce pas?*"

But before Nell could answer other girls joined

them, and Betty was introduced to a few of her future companions, who crowded around this very pretty addition to their number.

And Betty, all smiles, glanced about at them, her black-lashed eyes sparkling. How perfectly dear they all were! How delightful it was to be with so many nice girls! No wonder her mother could tell so many very interesting anecdotes of her school life!

"Oh," exclaimed Betty, quite suddenly, startling the girls a trifle, "and that must be Ma'mselle!"

Chérie and Nell exchanged glances, and the others nodded. Really, Betty was just one surprise after another. How did she know Ma'mselle?

"My mother told me so much about Ma'mselle," continued Betty, her eyes following the bent figure; fingering her beads with a shriveled hand; the once immaculate frill, flapping dejectedly about the sweet wrinkled face of the old religieuse.

"*Bien sûr,*" murmured Chérie, "*c'est Ma'm'selle* . . . but how did you recognize her, Betty?" The others looked at Betty, expectantly.

"Oh, my mother described her to me, again and again," returned Betty, her eyes still on Ma'm'selle, "and I knew her, at once . . . knew I couldn't be mistaken."

And Ma'm'selle it was! And Ma'm'selle had been pottering about her beloved plants, again; carefully, removing the dead leaves from the fast-withering stems. And Ma'm'selle was a "sight" as Nell expressed it. She had gone too close to the spray in her eagerness to reach a much neglected bunch of chrysanthemums, and the spray had played upon her, turning the stiff fluting about her face into a starchless rag. She had also torn her skirt on a wire protruding from the low fence, guarding the bushes within the enclosure; a great three-cornered rent marring the evidently new habit. But Ma'm'selle, herself, was

worried not at all. Such minor misfortunes failed to even ruffle her serene temperament. She was just as condescendingly gracious and sweet in the torn habit, the water-splashed frill, as she would have been in robes of state.

"She loves flowers," remarked one of the girls, "and they say anything she plants, grows."

"She was always with the flowers, when my mother was here," and Betty turned her gaze toward her companions. "She is very old. . . . I think she must have been here, always . . . and Mother says Ma'm'selle is not her full name, that . . ."

"There's the first bell," interrupted Nell, hastily, as the quarter bell rang loudly, calling to pupils to make ready for the noon-day meal. Betty was excited, and she was pleased with her audience. She was apt to say too much, to become too confidential. And, after all, the girls were strangers to her, with the exception of Chérie and herself. And one could never tell how a simple story might be exaggerated . . . and changed in repetition. So it behooved her to cut Betty's anecdote concerning Ma'm'selle short before harm could be made of it. And slipping her arm within Chérie's, she drew Betty toward them, allowing the others to pass them on their hurried way to the study hall where the line was forming for the refectory.

She wished to apologize to Betty for such seeming rudeness, a rudeness she was compelled to use to accomplish her purpose.

"There was no other way, Betty," she explained, "and the bell just at that moment was such a good excuse. . . ."

"C'est bien!" exclaimed Chérie, nodding her head, approvingly, "Nell is so wise . . . she looks ahead, *n'est-ce pas?"*

"Oh, I'm so glad you stopped me," said Betty,

earnestly, pressing Nell's arm, in appreciation of her friend's prudence, "I'm sure I can't tell what possessed me. . . . I just rattled on without a thought . . . and the whole thing would have been out before I realized what I was saying . . . and maybe it isn't generally known . . . and the cat would have been out of the bag. . . ."

"And what a catastrophe that would have been," laughed Nell, "but we'd better hurry! There goes the last call for dinner!"

. . . . . .

But Chérie and Nell had by no means relegated the interrupted anecdote to oblivion. Frequently, they thought of it during the study hours that followed. What was it that Betty knew about Ma'm'selle? They would ask her. It would be perfectly all right for Betty to tell them. They had Betty's interests at heart. They were friends, real friends.

That afternoon, after *goûter* had been disposed of, the three friends were strolling together, under the trees, in the park.

In the distance, they could see Ma'm'selle poking into some potted plants that had been placed by an open basement window, on the ground. So it was very easy to introduce the subject uppermost in the minds of Chérie and Nell, especially as Betty was also watching the old lady, so busily engaged with her self-imposed task.

"What were you going to say about Ma'm'selle, this morning, Betty?" asked Nell, "Chérie and I have been wondering what it could have been, ever since."

Betty laughed a little tantalizing laugh. "I don't know whether it would be wise . . . you know it's not generally known. . . ."

The cousins laughed at the unexpected reprisal on Betty's part.

"Be yourself, Betty, and let us hear it . . . all of it, remember. If you don't . . ." warned Nell, throwing herself into a tragic pose, and frowning darkly.

"Well then, here goes," began Betty in a resigned tone of voice, "prepare yourselves for something startling. . . . Ma'm'selle is a real live PRINCESS!"

"A princess!" ejaculated both girls in the same breath, amazement, incredulity battling for supremacy.

"Yes, a princess," nodded Betty, enjoying the effect of her revelation, "and she has blue blood in her veins, because she is royal. . . . Her father was a crowned king and her mother a queen. And that's why she is only called 'Ma'm'selle' . . . the mesdames don't want to be bothered with curious people, asking questions and writing things."

"Then it is a mighty good thing you didn't broadcast the information this morning, Betty," Nell reminded her, soberly.

"Yes, isn't it?" returned Betty, casting a grateful glance in her direction. "Of course, it must have all happened, ages and ages ago. She was only a baby, and some of the court ladies placed her in the Sacré Cœur, in Paris, for safety . . . and she has been years and years in this Canadian convent . . . she was only eighteen when she entered."

There was silence for a few seconds after Betty's voice died away, and the girls watched as the gentle old madame, who was a princess, whose blood was blue, whose father had been a reigning king, whose mother had been a queen, and the object of their regard, turned and came toward them; her long dress rustling over the dried leaves, as she walked, her cheeks flushed pink from the exertions among her beloved plants.

And she stopped in front of them, acknowledging their curtsies with a courtly bow. Then with a startled

glance at Betty, she extended her almost transparent hand and touched the girl's arm, allowing the delicate fingers to rest there.

"Ah, *ma petite* . . . I thought you were Elise, and that could not be. . . . Years never go back, they go on and on. . . ."

The quick blood crimsoned Betty's cheeks. "Oh, Ma'm'selle, Elise was my mother . . . and you remember her?"

"Ah, so well, so well! She was like you," the sweet old voice went on with a minor cadence, "her eyes . . . *ah, les beaux yeux, les beaux yeux* . . ." and muttering and shaking her head she left them; detecting some dead leaves on a clump of hydrangeas of a wonderful blue near the drive; forgetting aught else in her anxiety to attend the growing things she loved.

"So that is a princess," observed Nell, "the daughter of a king and a queen! Well, there's not much out of the ordinary in her . . . she's just a sweet old woman. . . ."

"*Bien sûr,*" murmured Chérie, "but she leaves an impression, so strange . . . an impression of power, dignity, and graciousness. . . ."

Nell laughed, a little cynically. "That's just because you know she is a princess, and you love princesses. We all do. That's the Peter Pan in all of us. We never really outgrow our love for fairy tales relating the trials and tribulations of the handsome princes and the beautiful princesses, and we keep them apart in our minds from the every-day, common-garden-variety of human beings around us."

"*Mais oui,* Nell, you forget something," Chérie said, rather sedately, "Ma'm'selle is not out of a fairy story . . . Ma'm'selle is real."

CHAPTER IV

The Feast Day

October had passed! October, with its soft warm breezes and its summery days. And November was here! It had been ushered in with storms of rain and wind, and the wind and the rain had held sway ever since, ruthlessly destroying and tearing down what it had taken the whole long summer to perfect.

The giant trees were bared, their stark branches swishing to and fro in the sudden, blustery gusts. The leaves, lately so gorgeous in their bright coloring, were lying about the flattened grass, sodden and crumpled, in little, unsightly heaps, and cluttering the driveway with thrown-together piles, swept up and down and back again from the arched-over entrance gate to the white marble steps leading up to the big bronze doors.

A dismal day without . . . dark, wet and cold; but within the great study hall brightness and subdued gayety prevailed. All the lights were on, and multicolored leaves and flowers decorated walls, window ledges and chandeliers. And all this was in honor of Mother Vernet. It was her Feast Day, and always stood out as a red-letter day to the pupils of the *Sacré Cœur*, as it did to the mother superior, herself, and to her community.

And to-day promised to be especially festive, judging from the time expended in preparation for the occasion. For, besides the usual entertainment, the addresses, the presentation of the gifts from the dif-

ferent classes, a dramatic production was on the program that had been in rehearsal almost a month.

Not that the spoken drama was an unusual thing in the school. Plays were frequently presented, but the casts had always been picked from among the outgoing graduates, year after year. No, the unusual thing about this affair was the selection of an untried girl to play the leading part. A girl from one of the lower classes. A newcomer who had only been in the school but a short time . . . only a few days before the rehearsals had been called.

That jealousy and criticism had been aroused goes without saying. The very air was blue with discontent. A nice thing to happen! Such a thing was without precedent! It wasn't fair! Madame Scott was too high-handed, too radical in her methods! What right had she to allow this girl to step in at the eleventh hour and carry off honors belonging to a senior?

But if Betty Desmond was aware of the commotion she had caused, she gave no sign. She was just the same happy-go-lucky little girl she had always been; creeping into the hearts of those about her without any seeming effort on her part. And to the chagrin of the malcontents, the majority of the pupils were arrayed, openly, on her side.

Chérie and Nell were delighted! Their friend had been chosen! Betty Desmond was a leading lady! And it was something to be on such intimate terms with a leading lady. It was almost as good as being the leading lady one's self. But there were times that Betty would have been better pleased if their interest in her welfare hadn't been quite so keen. It was as if her success or failure would reflect on them. She must study. She must be letter perfect in her part. And they saw to it, religiously, that she was, allowing not a day to pass without going over the many long speeches she must commit to memory.

"She will do well in the part," confided Nell to Chérie, "but it's wise to keep her keyed up."

"*Bien sûr,* I have no fear for her success . . . she is so wonderful. . . ." And Chérie shivered a little; remembering Betty's gruesome tones, warning somebody that some gobelins would get them or something to that effect. *Eh bien, la petite* could recite!

And now everything was in readiness for the performance. The dais, at one end of the study hall where, usually, chairs were arranged in a semi-circle for the mesdames, was for this occasion fitted up as a stage. A large green-and-white-striped awning had been requisitioned and used for the customary back drop, while smaller pieces of the same material formed the wings at each side. But just now, this was all screened from view by a draw curtain of unbleached muslin.

A baby grand piano had just suffered a series of arpeggios and a final thump. The overture was a thing of the past, and a tall girl, with glasses and a very business-like manner, arose, gathered up her music, and resumed her seat with the air of a great artiste.

A light clapping from the mother superior and the mesdames, occupying the chairs in the front row, signified their appreciation of the young lady's effort; but the rest of the assembled audience only looked relieved. The musical number had been no novelty to the pupils of the Sacré Cœur. That kind of a din was going on most of the time within the glassed-in music rooms on the floor above. Well, that was that! the last obstacle had been removed! Now, on with the Play!

A fluttering of the curtain attracted Chérie's gaze. What was wrong? Wouldn't it work? Betty had said something about the tapes and rings tangling together. What would they do, if they couldn't separate the curtains? She sighed. She wished Nell was with her,

but they were arranged according to classes, and her cousin was on the other side of the aisle. She felt lonesome, as one often does in a crowd; knowing there was nothing in common between her and any one of the girls about her.

And then, slowly, the curtains drew apart, revealing a clear stage with potted palms and huge potted rubber plants, indicating that the scene was a country lane, in which the first act was to take place.

The story of the play was simple. Two girls, one a poor little peasant, the other an heiress from a large city, meet, and both are amazed at the great resemblance they bear to each other. They are both dissatisfied with their respective positions. So, between them, they concoct a scheme to change places, the one with the other, relying on the similarity in their looks to render the deception successful.

And with this the first act ended, and the applause was deafening. Chérie stood up to throw a triumphant glance at Nell. Betty was splendid! The other girl was like a child reading a lesson. But, of course, that could not be helped. She was only taking part on account of her rather slight resemblance to Betty.

The next act was supposed to take place in the drawing room of the mansion; and one had to close one's eyes to the perpendicular green and white stripes on the sides, and the horizontal green and white stripes at the back, to get the desired effect; but otherwise the bearskin rug and the reception room furniture carried out the idea, exactly.

But who gave a thought to such trifles when Betty made her appearance on the scene? Betty dressed, or rather overdressed in the most gorgeous finery imaginable and procurable. Betty, pouting and grumbling; slipping and sliding on the polished floor in the most acrobatic manner; her hands extended, with grotesquely-stretched fingers, to save herself from falling.

And then, with a sort of wild war whoop she jumped for the rug, the only place of safety in sight. But alas, the unaccustomed height of the heels on her silver slippers proved to be her undoing; tangling themselves up in some unaccountable way with the rug, which slipped from beneath her feet and left her kneeling. Butler and maids flocked to her assistance but she would have none of them; jerking the pillows from the couch to hurl at the disappearing heads of the servants, who evidently thought their young mistress was quite insane and should be sent to an asylum. And so they made cautious entrances and hurried exits, dodging the missiles sent hurtling after them, until the artistic drawing room was in a state of disorder.

And then a bell rang somewhere behind the green and white stripes, and a maid led a poor, dejected girl into the room.

With a cry of delight, Betty, scrambling over the slippery floor by the aid of the scattered furniture, reached her.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come," she rejoiced, throwing her arms about the astonished visitor, "you take your things . . . and let me go back where I belong."

The girl straightened up, relieved, a smile on her lips. She had expected a different reception. But she was desperate. She could no longer stand the life of a peasant. She was a lady, an heiress, and came to demand her rights. But it was different with the peasant who had been masquerading in her place. Surely, she would never give up all this! There must be some mistake.

"Do you really want to go back?" she asked.

"Yes," Betty answered fiercely, "and take this trash off. . . . I loathe the sight of it . . . and of the place. . . ."

"No, no," said the lady, "keep the clothes and the jewels . . . you may have them . . . and I shall keep these," looking down at her ragged gown . . . "and I'll never again be dissatisfied. . . ."

"Nor I," declared Betty, "from now on, I shall always be content with my lot in life."

That was all, and the curtains slipped into place.

Chérie came back to her surroundings with a start. The audience was in an uproar. Betty had scored a success!

The mesdames glanced askance at the Mother Superior, and noted a decided twinkle in her dark eyes. Mother Vernet chuckled silently. Never before in the convent's theatrical endeavors had there been anything quite so realistic as this girl's performance, nor had there ever been anything quite so enjoyable! The child was decidedly clever!

And then the mother superior arose and faced her pupils, smiling; her bright eyes, darting here and there, taking all into her confidence. And she told them how happy they had made her by their efforts to please her, but from the applause she was sure they had been rewarded by the success of their plans. For herself and their teachers she wished to thank them, and hoped they would enjoy the turkey dinner which had been prepared for them.

"And as usual," she went on, "you may have *congé*, to-day . . . and you all know what that means in the *Sacré Cœur*!"

And then the presentations were made, and more speeches, but presently it was all over and the mesdames, with the exception of the mistress of the day, followed the Mother Superior from the hall.

Chérie turned to look for Nell. She felt confused. It was all so wonderful. How thoughtful Mother Vernet was! Just like one's own mother . . . loving and kind!

"Why, there's Chérie over near the platform," she heard Betty say, threading her way through the grouped-together girls to reach her, closely followed by Nell.

"*Eh bien,*" she greeted them, "did you think I had run away?"

Nell laughed. "Hardly, with all that's in prospect . . . but the girls were between us and you were completely hidden from me."

A sudden clanging of the refectory bell came from below. It was the summons to dinner, and the girls needed no second bidding to attend the promised banquet. And a banquet it was. Served with as much ceremony as if noted guests were present. From soup to nuts, the girls did justice to the repast.

"Oh, I'm so glad it's raining," whispered Betty, apropos of nothing, looking toward the rain-washed windows of the refectory.

"Oh, that's right, it is raining," observed Nell and she shivered a little. She had forgotten all about the dismal weather. "But will you please tell us why you are so glad about it, Betty?" she asked, and there was perplexity in her tones.

Betty cast a roguish glance at her. "Because we couldn't go out in the rain, and we'll have to make the best of it, indoors . . . and that means *cache-cache*!"

"*Mais oui, cache-cache,*" nodded Chérie, "I have heard of it from the girls . . . they say it is such great fun."

"But just what is it, when it's home?" queried Nell, plainly puzzled, "is it something to eat? . . . What is it?"

"Mademoiselle Desmond, I congratulate you," called a girl further up the table, before Betty could answer Nell's question. "Really," she continued, glancing about, bringing all into the conversation,

"she was simply marvellous in the part. She was the funniest thing . . . never laughed quite so much at one time, before in my life."

"Yes, yes," chorused the others, "so did I . . . and I. . . ."

"I thank you," murmured Betty, with a little inclination of her head, shrinking back between Chérie and Nell, knowing all eyes were turned in her direction, hoping to escape their line of vision. It was one thing to play a part, but quite another to hear herself discussed, openly, in this manner.

"But such is fame," teased Nell, realizing fully the resentment rankling within her quick-tempered little friend, "and you have no one to blame but yourself. . . . You shouldn't have done so well."

"*Eh bien,*" championed Chérie, "you must not say so . . . Betty could have done much better. . . ."

Nell interrupted with a laugh. "If she had, she'd have killed us all . . . my sides ache yet."

"*Bien sûr,*" agreed Chérie, earnestly, "I laughed, oh, so much . . . she was so droll . . . but she left so very many words out . . . you know that long speech, Betty, about. . . ."

"I know, Chérie," admitted Betty, ruefully, but a smile was on her lips, and a mischievous light within her eyes, "I should have remembered those lines better . . . after all the trouble you and Nell took to cram it into my brain. . . ."

"Oh, *non, non,*" cried Chérie, "it was no trouble . . . we enjoyed it more than you, Betty. . . ."

"I'll say we did," laughed Nell, "there were times that Betty wished we had never crossed her path."

CHAPTER V

Cache-Cache

"Owing to the inclemency of the weather, my dear young ladies," Madame Duprez was saying, and there was a pronounced tone of regret in her voice. The girls stared at her, and then looked about at one another, with raised brows and pursed-up lips. What was coming? Were the usual festivities to be called off? They hoped not! Study meant nothing in their gay young lives to-day!

"Owing to the inclemency of the weather," she repeated, "Mother Vernet deplores the fact that all outdoor games are out of the question . . . and the only thing to be done in the matter," she paused exasperatingly, once more, "is to resort to *cache-cache*, and. . . ."

But a round of applause broke in upon her. *Cache-cache*! That was just what they all wanted. What an end to a perfect day!

"*C'est bien*!" exclaimed Chérie, glancing excitedly from Nell to Betty, "Nell shall know all about the game, *n'est-ce pas*?"

Nell laughed. "I hope so . . . now that my curiosity is so aroused. Judging from the pleased countenances of my fellow pupils it must be some game. Certainly, they must expect a lot of fun."

"They do," nodded Betty, "and so do I . . . but think of the letter I'll have to write home. . . . I had better begin it, to-night."

"Just a minute, Betty, I'd like to make a suggestion. Wouldn't it be better if Chérie or I wrote about

your success? You know you'll never do yourself justice. You will make little of the part and say anyone would have done better with. . . ."

"What are you saying, Nell?" interrupted Betty, her perplexity giving way to a feeling of shyness that she did not understand. Why was it that she dreaded to hear herself praised for her histrionic ability? Why did she resent the interest she had aroused in others? She could not tell. Even Nell's well-meant nonsense seemed intrusive. "I am not thinking of the play . . . I mean this game . . . she will like to hear about it. . . ."

"*Mais oui,*" chimed in Chérie, coming to her rescue, noting the deeper hue in Betty's rose-tinted cheeks. Betty was overwrought. She had taken a good deal out of herself to-day. Later, when other things would fill the minds of those about her, Betty would realize that she was forgotten and be herself again. "And she liked to hear of Ma'm'selle so much, did she not, Betty?"

"Yes, and she was so pleased that dear old Ma'm'selle remembered her . . . and called me Elise. . . ."

"*Bien sûr,*" interrupted Chérie, "and why not? It is so nice to be remembered . . . and Ma'm'selle said you were so like her. . . ."

"And Father does, too," nodded Betty, a happy light coming into the purple-blue eyes, the dimples playing about her red, curved lips, "and she was so surprised to hear about the grotto in the park. . . . She was here at school with Elizabeth Parker . . . and she had not heard of her death. . . ."

But a general move on the part of the girls put a stop to the conversation. Dessert having been disposed of, Madame Duprez's signal now brought them all to their feet, and amidst a mild hubbub they left the refectory to the busy sisters, hurrying to and from

the great kitchens through the immense butler's pantry where the carving was done. And so many shadows they might have been, so noiseless were their movements, so soundless their soft-soled shoes.

The recreation room was large and square. The walls were lined with dumb-bells, Indian clubs, rings and wands and all the paraphernalia of an ordinary gymnasium. Further down the hall was a much smaller room for the younger girls, a reproduction of this in miniature, so that little hands and little arms would not be strained with the heavier equipments used by their seniors. And just now, these juniors were having a wonderful time with tag and other games as boisterous; so to their noise and fun we shall leave them, and follow the fortunes of the more grown-up pupils of the higher classes.

"Young ladies, silence," pleaded Madame Duprez, sharply bringing together, repeatedly, the two halves of the small brown wooden clapper she held in one hand. But her voice and her clapper were ineffectual with the chattering groups about her. So, in desperation, she motioned to a girl standing near the old piano in the far corner.

With a glance of understanding the girl seated herself and struck the opening chords of a popular dance number, and immediately, quietness reigned.

Madame Duprez held up her hand and the music ceased. "Young ladies," she warned, "I can do nothing with this noise. I know you have had an unusual license granted to you to-day, but remember we must have order to best enjoy the privilege."

The girls listened, and were quick to realize the sound reasoning in this argument, hushing, with rather telling nudges, those who were lapsing again into inattention.

Then two captains were appointed, two girls who had acted in that capacity before and so knew the

rules of the game, and were also familiar with the many hiding places in the house; for *cache-cache* was simply a game of hide-and-seek on a large scale. From a closet two thick ropes of great length, were taken, and how the girls cheered as the two captains, one on each side of the room, chose their followers; the ropes dangling from their hands!

And as it happened, Chérie was chosen on one side, while Nell and Betty were claimed by the other. This arrangement suited them not at all. They did not like to be separated. They felt cheated of more than half the anticipated enjoyment. Nell made several attempts to alter the situation, but the captains were so besieged on every side with questions on rules and regulations that it was impossible for her to get near enough to either of them to state the nature of her dissatisfaction, so she gave it up as hopeless.

A gong sounded from without. That was the signal for the game to begin. The captain who had been first chosen had precedence over her opponent. And so the side that Nell and Betty were on rushed from the room, the captain leading, her laughing followers all clutching the rope, one behind the other.

The whole house was thrown open to them, from cellar to attic, except the portion occupied by the religieuses, themselves, and the chapel. But every other part of the many-roomed mansion was at their disposal to be used as a hiding place, and the choice depended entirely upon the judgment of the captain.

And Chérie watched them go. A delightful sensation of exhilaration possessed her. She felt as if she were standing on tiptoe, awaiting the signal to be off! She was the huntress, and the quarry was seeking a lair! Oh, what a merry chase it would be!

She felt a tug on the rope she was holding, and looked about. The girls on either side of her were comparative strangers. They were not in any of her

classes, and she did not know their names. One was leaning outward, in front of Chérie, conversing with the other.

"It is to laugh," she was saying, "the way Mother Vernet pretends surprise every time her Feast comes around, year after year . . . the same old speech, the same old thanks . . ."

"Yes," assented the other, with a little disagreeable laugh, "I've often thought of that, too . . . and it's getting monotonous, I'll say."

"Well, I should say so," returned the first speaker, leaning a little closer against Chérie, "and I'd like to tell her. . . ."

"What would you like to tell Mother Vernet?" demanded Chérie, her tone sharp and indignant, pushing the girl from her at the same time, "that she is not truthful? Is that what you mean?"

The two girls, startled, drew back and stared at her. Why had this girl turned on them? What was Mother Vernet to her? Perhaps, she would carry the tale to the mother superior herself. One never could tell. She might be that type. Well, it was better to make a stand.

"I never said she was not truthful," the first girl denied, "I only said she pretended to be surprised . . . and she knows everything that could possibly happen, from the play to the presentations."

"How can you say that?" objected Chérie, "you know as well as I, that a play is never repeated. . . ."

"Oh, the play," grudgingly, "but everything else. . . ."

"It is a pity to separate you and your friend," said Chérie, disdain was in her voice, "you have the same thoughts . . . so, be together. . . . I shall find another place." And suiting the action to the words, she let go of the rope and went to the end of the line, where room was made for her without a question.

"*Eh bien*, it is the same everywhere," she thought, sadly, "always some one is displeased . . . always someone criticizes . . . even dear Mother Vernet who is so kind. . . ."

And then came the first sound of the gong, and the rope became taut on the instant. The girls grasped it tighter, and the forward movement began. The hunt was on!

Once out in the wide corridor, they flew along until they reached some steps leading to underground regions, where barrels of potatoes, apples and onions were carefully ranged in rows against the wall. Into closed-off spaces containing shelf upon shelf of preserved fruits and vegetables grown in the convent gardens and canned in the convent kitchens. Into dark places where turnips and celery and carrots lay banked in sand, ready for use during the long winter; and bunches of grapes in sawdust, placed there so carefully in shallow wooden boxes by the old gardener and his assistants. And even into the furnace room they went, but the fugitives were not in the cellars.

So, up the steps they ran, and through the corridors, rounding corners abruptly, the leader putting on spurts of sudden speed that made her followers gasp, at times. Oh, what fun it was!

Chérie was delighted. There was no danger, but plenty of thrills. The girl she had displaced was tall and strong, and probably had been chosen for the end of the line for those very reasons. But adroitness was needed more than strength, and Chérie congratulated herself on possessing that; so she clung with both hands to the end of the rope and enjoyed every moment as it came.

And now the top floor rooms had all been ransacked, and in deep silence they were stealing up the attic stairs on tiptoe. This was the last stand! They were here, or they were on their way "home!"

The attic was high in places, and partitioned off into rooms. But the partitions were only unpainted, unplaned boards; and through the doors, opened one after the other, one could see that the rooms were unfurnished, only broken pieces of furniture, and boxes of books and papers being stored therein.

They had it to themselves! Evidently, they had missed their quarry on one of the lower floors. How puffed up they would be!

The captain turned and faced them. She was bitterly disappointed, and showed it. "There is one chance left," she told them, "and we'll try it. There is another stairway at the back, and we might surprise them before they reach "home," and then we can run for it. Now, be careful," she cautioned, as they entered a narrow hallway, "it is darker here, so hang on to the rope. . . ."

But the gong from below interrupted her. It was no use! They had lost! The other side was victorious!

Dejectedly, they all turned about and marched back to the stairway they had so hopefully ascended a few minutes before, all with one exception, and the exception happened to be Chérie. In turning about with the others she wrenched her ankle. A sharp pain shot through it unnerving her completely, and with a moan she let the rope slip from her fingers. If she could only rub it, even through the laced-up shoe, she might ease it a little. After a moment or so, the pain did become less, and she straightened up to follow.

But she was alone! Alone in the semi-darkness of the narrow hall. The others had gone on without knowing of her accident, totally unconscious that they had left one of their number behind them in the dim, narrow passage leading to the back-attic stairway.

Eh bien! She would follow them! That was easy! The door closing off the stairway would be open. And then a vague impression troubled her, an im-

pression of a door banging loudly. Painfully, she limped along, using the rough, board partition for a support, trying to keep as much weight as she possibly could from off her aching foot, and by degrees she managed to edge her way into the lighter, wider hall.

She gave a swift glance around. Her latent fear was realized! All the doors were closed! Which one should she open?

Confused a trifle, she decided on one just beyond her. A sigh of relief escaped her lips as she reached it, and turned the knob, but the door stuck. She pushed against it with all her strength and quite suddenly, it gave way, and sent her headlong into the room, cruelly twisting her injured ankle and she caught at the window ledge on the far side of the small, closed-in space, to keep from falling.

A sharp click made her turn. The door released from her hold had swung to and closed! Steadying herself along the partition, she reached the knob and turned it, but the door would not open. Alarmed, she tugged and tugged, this way and that, but it did not budge. In some mysterious way, the lock must have jammed. Helplessly, she glanced around the bare, unfurnished room. There was no other means of egress! Chérie was a prisoner!

CHAPTER VI

The Knight-Errant

Chérie was a prisoner. There was no mistake about that. A prisoner in this tiny attic room, a room seldom if ever used, and probably the last place in the house to be searched. In that case she might be here all night . . . or even longer. Chérie shivered. Suppose. . . . She glanced about wildly. There must be some way, surely. But there was not, and she knew it. She was as securely locked in, as if the door and one window were protected by bars of iron. The door resisted all her efforts and the window was fifty feet from the ground.

Disconsolately, she allowed her eyes to rest on the blurred glass of the small dormer window set in under a peak of the roof. The incessant rain beat pitilessly against it, streaking its panes with tiny rivulets, dimming the already waning light of this bleak November day. And backwards and forwards, the bared top of a tree scratched against the sash, wind-bent and wind-driven, like a shadow flitting at intervals before her gaze.

What would she do? What could she do? She was helpless. Her foot burned and throbbed, and occasional sharp pains darted through her ankle like knife-thrusts. Perhaps the shoe should be removed. So, cautiously, she allowed herself to sink to the floor, leaning against the jamb for support, and with difficulty drew out the laces. And then to her dismay, her foot began to swell, puffing up in an incredibly short space of time in a most surprising manner.

"Oh, *hélas*!" she moaned, "if Nell, or Betty would miss me, they would look for me . . . but they were on that other side. . . ."

Ah, that was the pity of it! If she had not been separated from her friend and her cousin, she would have been saved so much. Maybe the accident might have been avoided. Who can tell? But there was one thing of which she was sure. Sooner or later Nell and Betty would come to her rescue. Nothing could daunt them. They would leave no stone unturned until they found her. And *le bon Dieu* would show them the way. But she must be patient. It might take some time to find this room, and they might not think of the attic at first.

"*Bien sûr*," she murmured, "only a little while, and they shall come to me . . . dear Nell and *ma petite*. . . ."

The pain became less and less in her injured foot. A feeling of drowsiness was creeping over her and, closing her eyes, she slept.

But for how long, she never knew. It might have been a minute, it might have been a hour! With her awakening start she wrenched her swollen ankle, sending a jab of pain through it that made her wince. In fright, she glanced about; her heart thumping within her. *Something furry and soft had touched her hand!*

What had it been? A rat? A mouse?

She shivered. The room was cold, and her teeth were beginning to chatter. But there was nothing terrible about a mouse. Maybe the poor little creature had been frightened almost to death when he beheld her propped up against the jamb of the door. Once, in Paris she had struck one and killed it, and her mother had called her brave. It must have been a baby mouse, it was such a tiny thing. It had crawled up to the very top of her mother's big cushioned chair, and there it was perched, almost touching the wavy,

dark hair, piled high on her mother's head. And on the impulse of the moment, she thrust aside her own repugnance, and saved her mother an attack of nerves. But she shuddered now at the remembrance of the ordeal.

She looked fearfully about the floor, dreading to see the small, darting shape, hoping it had made good its escape, and as her eyes dwelt for a moment upon a broken-away part of the rough boards, forming the base about the room, she saw a half-grown kitten force an entrance through the aperture. A striped gray-and-white kitten!

"Oh, oh, *le petit tigre,*" she cried, clasping her hands together in delight; recognizing the little intruder as the kitten of the cricket field. "Where didst thou come from, *petit chat?* Tell me . . ."

But the kitten, nosing about the surbase in quest of his runaway prey, did not seem to notice her.

"*Allons,*" she coaxed, "*allons, mon petit chat . . .*"

And the kitten, in the tantalizing way a cat makes advances, came slowly toward her, differing so from the exuberance of a dog's greeting. But, finally, after a series of manœuvres, he approached her and, purring loudly, rubbed against her in a very friendly manner.

"*Mais oui . . . ron-ron,*" she approved, stroking the soft fur to the accompaniment of the steady purr-r-r of the satisfied kitty.

"*Eh bien,*" she continued, "I am so glad you are with me . . . but you must go back and tell them about me . . . tell them Chérie is a prisoner up here in the attic, *mon petit chat . . .*"

A blank stare from the round, greenish eyes was her only response. She laughed aloud, and the sound of the laugh came back to her, echoing through the raftered space above. She shrank back a little and

closed her eyes to shut out the surroundings from her gaze. What a place to be in! It was still light, but presently it would be dark. . . . What then?

She moved her injured foot a trifle. Perhaps the rest had accomplished much. But she could not repress the moan wrung from her lips by the sharp, stinging pain, warning her to let well enough alone. She must make the best of it, that was all. Another such twinge might cause her to faint, and then when Nell and Betty came for her she would not hear them . . . and not call them . . . and they might go away without finding her . . .

"Oh, *mes amis,*" she wailed, "if I only could let you know where I am . . . up here, alone. . . ."

And then her eyes rested in a speculative manner on her fourfooted visitor, and an idea began to form in her brain.

That was it! Why not? The kitten was here, and eventually would return to the kitchens. And in some way that she must contrive he could make known her plight. But how? That was the question. Who ever heard of such a thing! Who could control a cat's actions? But surely there must be some way. . . .

Concentrating on this rather knotty problem, she finally hit upon a plan. It might succeed and it might fail. Only time would tell. But it was a chance . . . and any chance was worth trying.

"*Bien sûr,* I shall tear this small piece . . . so," she murmured, taking from about her throat her white, starched collar and attempting to carry out her intention. But the linen resisted all her efforts, and remained intact.

"But thou shall not best me, thou obstinate one," she scolded, drawing a small leather case from her pocket, and extracting therefrom her manicure scissors, a weapon to which the collar fell an easy victim,

the tiny curved blades leaving jagged edges behind them.

She had a small notebook in her possession, but paper would not last very long, subjected to the hardships in store for anything traveling the route her intended message must take to reach the hoped-for destination. So that had been rejected, almost as the thought came to her mind. But linen was tough and would endure any wear and tear. *Eh, bien!* She knew from experience.

A silver pencil hanging on a black ribbon about her neck was requisitioned next, and she wrote the following, on the scrap of the white linen, telling what had happened and where she was detained:

"I, Chérie Lawson, have hurt my foot and I cannot walk. I let go of the rope and the girls went on without me. They did not know that I was left behind. I tried to follow but opened the door into this room instead of the door to the stairs. And this door locked itself when it closed, making me a prisoner in the room, somewhere near the front attic stairs. Show this note to Nell Brooks and Betty Desmond."

That was all. And she had to cramp the penciled words together, to fit them in the ragged little square, but she managed to make the tiny document quite legible.

"And thou, *petit chat,* shall be my knight-errant . . . a knight-errant always rescues the lady fair. . . ."

She paused in consternation and allowed the piece of blue ribbon that had been the bow so lately holding together her collar, to slip from her fingers. *The kitten was disappearing through the hole by which he had entered!* And all hope of rescue melted into thin air!

"*Hélas, hélas,* he is gone," she sobbed in her dis-

tress, hopeless disappointment filling her eyes with tears.

In desperation, she picked up the ribbon and crushed it with the linen in her hand. There was just a chance that she might be able to coax the little madcap back, and she dragged herself across the floor, to the opening in the surbase and looked in.

She held her breath. Two shining, round eyes were staring into hers. Another move might prove fatal, so she remained perfectly still, watching until, disconcerted by her steady gaze he blinked and began backing away.

This would never do. She would look away, and appear indifferent, tapping her fingers on the floor.

And her tactics proved successful inasmuch as enticing him into the room was concerned. Now to catch him! *Eh bien*, that would take *finesse*! So when she saw him crouched, eyes following her restless fingers, she waited until he pounced upon her hand. Then she clapped her free hand upon his neck, holding him as in a vice.

What a struggle ensued!—kitten fighting every inch of the way to regain his freedom, Chérie holding on to the wriggling bundle of fur as if her life depended on it, as in very truth, she thought it did. And she managed, finally, to tie the ribbon about his neck; the piece of linen, containing her appeal for help, dangling in front.

"*Voila, petit chat,*" she exclaimed, putting his nose into the opening, "go through there . . . and run to the kitchens, as fast as your four little feet can carry you. . . ."

But *petit chat* had other plans for the disposal of his time, and refused resolutely to be forced through the hole, growling and hissing, as she persisted, in a most vindicative manner, dodging this way and that to avoid an ejection so humiliating.

This performance lasted some little time, and Chérie was beginning to feel the strain. Sharp pains were again shooting through her badly swollen foot. He *must* go! It was so necessary that he should! And then, quite suddenly, it dawned on his catship that anything was preferable to the present situation. So with a final hiss he bolted from her hands and from her sight, leaving Chérie panting but thankful.

"*C'est bien*, someone shall see him with that decoration . . . and wonder what it is . . . and read my message. . . ."

She glanced at her watch. It wanted five minutes of three. If Nell or Betty had not missed her before, they would, now, in a very short time. Always at three they met for *goûter*. To-day, the dinner had been so very elaborate that their afternoon luncheon might be served a little later, but even so, the delay would not exceed a half hour. *Eh bien*, she would possess her soul in patience for a little while longer.

And so, dreamily, she waited, occasional twinges preventing the sleep that would have lulled her into forgetfulness. And thoughts filled her mind. How her life had broadened out within the past year! In Paris, there had been only Nanette and Monsieur le Cure to care whether she had lived or died. Now, she had a host of friends. There were Nell, Betty, Uncle Bob, dear Madame Wolfson, and the Browns. She could not forget the Browns. Dear Pop and Mom Brown, the genial farmer, and his sweet, motherly wife. And the twins! *Bien sûr*, she would not leave the twins off her list! She loved Dot and Dash. They were so true, always, to their beloved Chérie.

That they had not written as they had promised did not surprise her, knowing their antipathy to composition in any form. Probably, at this very moment, they were in the throes of a masterly effort. And fearful and wonderful would be the result; so characteristic

would be the treatment afforded English in general and spelling in particular.

How she would enjoy the letter! It would be just like a visit from the twins, that is, if they kept their promise made when they bade her adieu. "Now, you must write to me," she had insisted, "and write to me as if you were speaking to me . . . and I shall be so pleased. . . ." And they had assented readily enough, seeming to understand.

She moved her foot a little, hoping to ease the dull ache. Her head throbbed, and she placed her cold hands against her forehead to cool it. She hoped that somebody had seen *le petit chat* . . . in the halls . . . or on the stairs. . . .

Years ago, her dear father had read to her an old legend, and the horror of it had always remained with her. Often, she dreamed of it; awakening with a start, always . . . and it came to her now, and she shuddered. It was strange . . . *cache-cache*, too. . . .

For it had been hide-and-seek the bride was playing, so the story ran, on her wedding day, and she had hidden herself in an old carved oaken chest that closed with a spring. And not till a great many years later did they find her. . . .

Suppose *le petit tigre* tore the piece of linen from his neck, and it was now in one of the passageways. . . . What then?

They might never think of this unused attic room! It might be years before she would be found!

Non, non, le bon Dieu would save her! He would send Nell and Betty to her rescue! Her trust was in *le bon Dieu*!

CHAPTER VII

The Message

"Did you say your mother's sister, Betty?" asked Nell, raising her eyebrows in surprise.

"Yes, Aunt Lou," returned Betty, "she is my mother's youngest sister, and she married a local doctor . . . and they live here in the town, in a great big old-fashioned, corner house. . . ."

"But why did you never mention them, before?" was Nell's perplexed question, "I cannot understand such reticence as that. . . ."

"I didn't mean to be reticent, Nell," deprecated Betty, eagerly, "but Aunt Lou wrote Mother that her two youngest were only recovering from the whooping cough, and that she wouldn't be able to see me, until they were better . . . and I wanted you and Chérie to have a big surprise when they all came."

"And you never told Chérie about them either?"

Betty shook her head. "No, I guess not . . . I never happened to think of it, somehow, in New York . . . and here, as I said before, I meant it to be a surprise and let them speak for themselves . . . as they would . . . and how!"

"Now you must be speaking of your cousins," laughed Nell, "judging from the tone of your voice they must be boys. Only boys could provoke that intonation of hopelessness."

"Yes, they are boys, but I'm sure I didn't intend to give you such an impression of them. I love them. . . . They are the nicest, merriest, happiest urchins,

in the whole world. . . . Chérie will be delighted with them. . . . Just wait and see!"

"They sound as numerous as a regiment," teased Nell, "how many are there?"

"Six of them, no less! Can you imagine six boys in any house at one and the same time? Well, it's all that and slightly worse. Yes, you ought to see them at play on a day such as this. . . . Aunt Lou says she hasn't one perfect piece of furniture in the whole house . . . and she doesn't care a straw as long as her little men are well . . . nor neither does Uncle John . . ."

"No wonder the boys are so happy," observed Nell, soberly, "with such parents . . . the pity is, all children are not so fortunate."

Nell looked around at the groups of girls, scattered about the recreation room. The game now was practically over. What a chase the last one had been! But they had made "home," and were now waiting for their discomfited opponents to appear upon the scene.

"Our side has won the pennant, Betty," she said.

"Yes," answered Betty, "isn't it great? . . . But I do wish Chérie had been with us. . . ."

"So do I . . . that was the fly in the ointment," grumbled Nell. "Why, it is almost four," she continued, glancing at her watch, "and *goûter* is a whole hour late. . . ."

"No wonder I've been feeling the pangs of hunger," pouted Betty.

"What, after that dinner, Betty? Surely not!"

"Well," with a little grimace, "I wish they'd hurry up, anyway . . . they are slower than molasses in January, as my little cousin Joseph says . . . Joseph is such a dear. . . ."

And again Betty's relatives were up for discussion, and she recounted another little anecdote of her

mother's girlhood, incidentally, mentioning the proximity of the old Norton homestead to the neighboring town, within a mile of the Sacré Cœur.

"Then your mother's folks were pioneers of the place," remarked Nell, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes," returned Betty, smiling, "my great-great-grandfather Norton—I'm afraid I haven't all the 'greats' in, but there are enough to let you know that it was generations ago—well, great-great-grandfather Norton came to this country, and settled on Crown land. . . ."

"Crown land?" questioned Nell, "and just what is Crown land?"

"Well, it was land bestowed by the sovereign, reigning at that time, on Sergeant Norton, for services rendered in India . . . or something like that. Lots of British soldiers were rewarded in the same way . . . that was ages before Canada was made a Dominion, and this town near us was a garrison town . . . and the house where Uncle John and Aunt Lou live was used as officers' quarters. . . ."

The door opened, noisily. The defeated ones filed into the room, and Nell eagerly scanned each girl, in turn, as the line passed her, still holding on to the rope; catching her breath a little when the last one went by, rubbing her eyes to make sure that she had made no mistake.

Where was Chérie?

Suddenly, she became conscious that she had not glimpsed her cousin since the beginning of the game; and the realization came upon her like a shock. It was strange, now that she thought of it. Very strange! Of course, the constant action and confusion attendant upon a game like *cache-cache*, must be taken into consideration . . . but even so. . . .

"Betty," she whispered, "do you see Chérie any

where? I must be shortsighted . . . I've been looking at every girl in the room. . . ."

Betty sent a quick glance around the room, before answering.

"I don't see her, either. I wonder where she is . . . she might have come here instead of going up to that old studio. . . ."

The studio! Nell had not thought of that as a solution. Yes, that was it! She was always running up to the studio. But it would be as well to make inquiries. . . . Supposing she had not gone to the studio. . . . She knew that *goûter* was late. . . . Calling one of the girls, Nell questioned her.

"Yes," the girl told her, "I know Chérie Lawson, she was with us right along. . . ."

"But she didn't come in here with you," said Nell, "I know . . . I was watching for her. . . ."

"No," and she shrugged her shoulders, "well, really, I cannot say. . . . I did not notice. . . ."

And then Nell heard her name called with some others. Madame Duprez was deputizing them to carry the *goûter* from the kitchen for serving. The sisters had left everything in readiness, it seemed, before availing themselves of the few hours' recreation granted to them by the mother superior.

"Run up to the studio, and see if she's there, Betty," said Nell, in a hurried tone, before leaving her friend to follow the others.

Betty nodded assent. She felt restless. It was so strange that Chérie did not come. She hoped she was in the studio. She would go at once, and see. So, slipping out of the room, she flew up flight after flight of stairs; arriving almost breathless at the closed door of the studio. With a push of her hand against the panels, it opened wide. The room was quite deserted. Chérie was not in the studio!

A panicky feeling took possession of Betty. She

shook herself, as if by so doing, she could rid herself of the disagreeable sensation. What nonsense! What could possibly happen to Chérie? Probably she was in the recreation room, now. She might have missed her. . . .

But Chérie was not in the recreation room, and wildly, Betty grabbed Nell's arm, and dragged her to one side; the platter of cake, Nell was holding, tipping perilously.

"She's not in the studio," she cried, "I've just come from there, this second . . . and she's not here . . . I thought maybe she'd be with you! Oh, Nell, where is she?"

Nell gazed into Betty's tear-filled eyes, startled; and a death-like pallor crept up over the rose-tinted cheeks, reflecting the fear within the mind of her friend. What had happened to Chérie? Where, oh where was she? She would search for her! She must be found, that's all. And, thrusting the half-emptied plate into the hands of another girl, she rushed to Madame Duprez.

"Oh, Madame," she said, anxiety in her trembling voice, "my cousin, Chérie Lawson, has not come back with the other girls . . . and I'm afraid something must have happened. . . ."

"Oh, my dear child, I hope not," interrupted Madame Duprez with a little gasp of dismay, "but go and search for her. . . . She may have become weak. . . . Go at once, and look everywhere. . . . Stay! Others must go, also! You . . . and you . . . and you. . . ." Singling out from the girls, now crowding around, attracted by Nell's alarmed tones, those most fitted for the task, making the two captains first choice.

And then the search began! And what a search it was! Some went up, and some went down, ransacking every room in the house.

Nell led the way through the cellars, looking askance at every barrel or box in sight. Nothing must be overlooked. Anything might prove to be the hiding place. Oh, if she could only find her! Her dear cousin, how sweet she was . . . the smiling, red-lipped mouth . . . the beautiful dark eyes . . . the gay little manner that cloaked so effectually from the casual on-looker the wonderful depth of feeling, beneath. To know her was to love her! She was so true, so kind. . . .

But she was not in the cellars, nor in the kitchens above . . . nor in any other part of the house. And these were the reports brought back to the very much worried Madame Duprez.

"And are you sure you have looked everywhere?" she questioned, anxiously, glancing about.

"Yes, Madame, everywhere," chorused the disappointed searchers.

"And the attic?" she persisted.

"Oh, yes, we went up there, Madame," answered the girl, who had captained Chérie's line, "that is, we looked up the stairs, but I didn't think it was worth while going any further, because we had only used the attic once; and then we had no sooner gone up the stairs, when the gong went, and we had to turn around and come down again."

Madame Duprez's lips tightened. She must control all emotion. The pupils must not be excited. There was only one thing to be done now . . . she must acquaint the mother superior of Mademoiselle Lawson's strange disappearance. And she glanced about for Nell, deeming her the proper person to carry the message.

"Where is Mademoiselle Brooks?" she enquired.

"She is still searching, Madame," answered Betty. "She doesn't like to give up until Chérie is found. . . ."

"No, no . . . but go to her and say I wish to speak to her. . . ."

And Betty flew to do her bidding.

. . . .

Meanwhile, Nell was wandering about, listlessly, her heart like lead within her. It was like some bad dream! It must be a dream! Such a thing couldn't happen, really! But it was no dream, and she must keep up the search. She must find Chérie!

But she had no objective. There was no place that had not been thoroughly searched. And so she walked slowly the length of the corridor and entered the kitchen directly back of the butler's pantry.

The steady beating of the rain against the window attracted her attention and, crossing the room, she peered through the water-splashed glass. It was not quite dark yet but nothing could be distinguished outside in the rapidly rising fog.

She shuddered, and turned away. How dismal it was! And pressing a button near the jamb of the door, she flooded the place with light.

A slight noise directed her attention to a small closed door near the range, and she decided to investigate. Cautiously opening it, she peeped in and saw what was evidently a back stairway, and, tumbling about on a tiny landing, a few steps up, was a kitten, endeavoring to rid himself of some obnoxious decorations that had evidently been tied on him for fun.

"Poor little thing," murmured Nell, in disgust, "what peculiar ideas of humor some people possess."

The sound of her voice brought the kitten to his feet instantly, intent on eluding this new enemy.

"Why, it's the little tiger Chérie petted that day in the cricket field . . . and that's a piece of blue ribbon . . . and there's writing on that white thing. . . ."

She made a sudden grab for the kitten, but, like

a flash, he was down the steps and into the kitchen, dodging here and there and everywhere in his desire to escape.

But all the doors were closed. Nell had attended to that. She must see what was written on that piece of ragged linen!

So she cornered him, and swooping down suddenly, captured him, just as Betty opened the door. Surprised, she stared at Nell. Why was she playing with a kitten?

"Madame Duprez wishes to see you, Nell," she told her, and her tones lacked approval. "Chérie is still lost, you know."

"Oh, but read this, Betty," cried Nell, trying to hold the biting, scratching, hissing little quadruped in a way that rendered him harmless. "I'm sure it is Chérie's writing . . . but this thing refuses to stay still and I cannot make it out. . . ."

"Oh, oh, you don't mean it, Nell. . . . Say it again," and Betty dashed over to Nell. "Let me see it. . . ."

Nell held the frantic little creature while Betty, with considerable difficulty, deciphered the penciled words, so cramped and faint, on the soiled surface of the linen rag, reading aloud, haltingly, the message Chérie had written.

And the erratic little knight-errant who had delivered it, much against his will, spat and growled as her whereabouts became clear to her cousin and to her friend.

CHAPTER VIII

The Rescue

Chérie waited, and as the minutes slowly dragged themselves into hours, her anxiety grew. She had lost all knowledge of the time. The room now was quite dark, the window but a gray blur suspended before her eyes, and she could no longer discern the position of the hands on the face of her tiny wristwatch.

She glanced about, as she had glanced about dozens of times, vainly seeking for any indication of a means for illumination. She sighed. What she couldn't find in daylight could hardly be seen, now. Evidently this partitioned-off space had not been wired at all. Could it be possible that no one knew of this room? But she pushed this thought aside. It terrified her! And surely with its door in plain view, someone must know there was such a place. *Eh bien*, she would forget that! And then thoughts of *le petit tigre* came to her. Would they find her message still tied about his neck? Or had it been wrenched off? After all, it was but a slender chance to depend upon; an irresponsible little dumb animal, with only one thought in the flighty bit of brain the creature possessed: the desire that had brought him up to this attic room, the desire to appease his hunger. The mouse had eluded him, cheating him of the expected meal, so, naturally, he would return to the kitchens to offset his recent disappointment; hunger and his sense of smell would force him in that direction.

"*Hélas*," she murmured, "he was so frightened

. . . so angry . . . and it annoyed him. . . . He may have torn it off. . . ."

She paused to listen. A sound from without had reached her. A creaking sound of a footstep on a dried-out board . . . then more footsteps. They must be coming up the attic stairs. . . . They were hunting for her. *Le bon Dieu* be praised!

"CHERIE. . . . CHERIE," came the voices . . . and then the door banged back with a crash, and a flood of light swept over her, blinding her in its dazzling brilliancy, rendering it an impossibility to distinguish one from another of those crowding around her. . . .

But presently Nell's eyes were looking into hers, and Nell's arms were about her. "Oh, my dear little cousin . . . to think of all you must have suffered . . . alone. . . ."

"She must be taken to the infirmary, at once," fussed Madame Duprez, all solicitude in a moment. Poor child, how pale she was! No more time must be lost! The foot was twice its natural size now! Two of the older girls could carry her down with little or no difficulty. And again directing on Chérie the light of the flash she still held in her hand, she issued orders to that effect.

From the many who volunteered, two were chosen, and Chérie was lifted up carefully and placed in the chair formed by their intertwined arms, and deposited safely, a little later, on the big red couch in the infirmary; the mesdames as well as their pupils fluttering about, eager to make her comfortable until the doctor came.

And to Chérie's rather muddled brain, it was all like a dream, a pleasant dream. She was no longer alone. Nell was beside her, and Betty was smiling at her, and all the others were so kind. . . . And when the doctor came into the room, she heard Betty

call him, "Uncle John." "*Eh bien,*" she murmured to herself, "it is a dream. . . ."

But later, when the big, broad-shouldered doctor had gone, she glanced at Betty, and there was a puzzled expression in her dark eyes, a little frown of perplexity drawing together the finely-arched eyebrows above. It was all clear now. . . . She had not been dreaming at all.

"What is it, Chérie," enquired Betty, anxiously, "does it still ache? Shall Sister Moran apply more of the lotion?"

"*Non, non, ma petite,*" she replied, "it does not ache, it is so nice and cool now. Something came to me, I was thinking. . . ."

"It couldn't have been about anything nice or pleasant to make you frown like that, Chérie . . . so forget it."

"*Mais oui,* it was about you, Betty . . . and the doctor. I thought I heard you call him "Uncle John," and I did not understand. . . ."

Betty looked at Nell, and their amused glances met.

"So I did, Chérie," admitted Betty, "and he is my uncle."

"And thereby hangs a tale," from Nell, in a rather sepulchral voice, "a most surprising tale."

And "a most surprising tale" it proved to be, Chérie thought, as she learned of the existence of Betty's Canadian relatives.

"Don't forget the six cousins, Betty . . . tell her about them . . . tell her about the six Donovan boys. . . ."

"Oh, she'll hear of them, soon enough," laughed Betty, "from twelve-year-old Jack down to little Joseph, not quite two; not forgetting the in-betweens, Francis, Timothy, Gerald and Tom. . . ."

"Don't they sound interesting, Chérie," said Nell, "wouldn't you like to see them?"

"*Mais oui,*" she nodded, "they must be wonderful, that family. . . . When shall we see them, Betty?"

"In a day or so, Uncle John just promised. . . . Tom and little Joseph are better now, so you are liable to have them all here Saturday with bells on."

"*C'est bien,*" exclaimed Chérie, "then they shall make themselves heard, those boys!"

"I'll tell the . . ." began Nell, and paused abruptly, an expression of annoyance creeping into her eyes. Unconsciously, she repeatedly lapsed into slang. She glanced at Chérie, a trifle covertly, hoping she had not noticed. For, strange to say, Nell, past-mistress in the use of schoolgirl slang, was striving, now, to eliminate it from her vocabulary.

"It sounded so flat," she had confided to Chérie, a few days before, after expressing her appreciation of something in a slang phrase to Madame Duprez; "and Madame never pretended that she heard. . . . So somehow, I can't explain . . . but it doesn't seem to fit in here."

"That is so," had assented Chérie, "it does not belong to this environment . . . *n'est-ce pas?*"

. . . .

It was Saturday morning. The sound of girlish voices floated in from the cricket field beyond the park. It was recreation hour, but Nell and Betty were with Chérie when the invasion occurred.

They were not surprised, they rather expected it. In fact, they would have been very much disappointed if Dr. Donovan had not brought his six small sons that day to the *Sacré Cœur.*

"Well, young ladies, here we are," cried the genial doctor, in his hearty tones, leading the boys into the infirmary, "the whole Donovan family, from the tallest to the smallest."

And for a moment all was confusion. But presently

each one was introduced to everybody else and things quieted down.

"It was so good of you to bring them, Uncle John," said Betty, marshaling the small visitors to chairs about the room.

"Umph," ejaculated the doctor, "I had to bring them to save my reason . . . and their mother, well. . . . "

"Mammy says you must come back with us, Betty," burst out little Tom, his dark-lashed eyes so like Betty's own, gazing at her, pleadingly.

"And leave Chérie, Tom," objected Betty, "I couldn't do that to-day, little cousin. . . . Wait 'till she is able to walk about again. You know you wouldn't want me to leave her. . . ."

"Let *her* stay," indicating Nell, with a chubby little index finger, "and you come with us, Betty. . . ."

"Another time, Tom," promised Betty, "and you tell Mother . . ."

"That Betty will bring her two friends along with her, when she comes," interrupted Tom's father, quick to note the disappointment in the sensitive little face; knowing his small son was on the verge of tears; wishing to avert the calamity that would stigmatize him with his brothers as a cry-baby.

And later, when Chérie was alone, presumably resting, she was thinking of the great love this good father had for his sons, and how they loved him in return. How proud he was of the manly little fellows! How tenderly he had picked up little Joseph, the baby of the family and held him in his arms; the others following him eagerly, without a plea to remain, evidently satisfied just to be with him, their father.

. . . .

The following Monday morning, the infirmary was flooded with sunshine. The half-past eight bell had

rung its warning. The pupils were still in the big study hall, preparing for their respective classes. And Chérie kept her eyes on the door, expectantly. Any moment, Nell or Betty would appear to pay the usual morning visit. Her foot was still bandaged and as yet she had used it but seldom, according to Dr. Donovan's orders.

"*Eh bien,*" she sighed, "I shall be so thankful to go about again. . . ."

Her glance strayed from the door to the large bay window, where *le petit tigre*, the erstwhile unwilling knight-errant of her latest adventure, lay basking in the sun's golden rays, insisting on this spot in particular, since Chérie's occupancy of the room. And as she gazed at him, one eye opened, and he purred loudly in acknowledgment of her notice, stretching luxuriously, in the warmth about him, imperiling a slender vase that dear old Ma'm'selle had placed there a few minutes earlier, a beautiful blue flower rearing itself proudly from the glass container. Ma'm'selle had tendered it as a solace to the invalid. She had come on it, half-hidden under sodden leaves, and had borne it triumphantly to Chérie, bestowing it on her with the sweet graciousness that characterized her. And Chérie had caught the thin white fingers within her own, and pressed them to her lips.

"It never rains, but it pours," observed Nell, handing first a bright pink envelope, and then another of a delicate shade of gray; "I notice the twins are still addicted to colorful stationery." It was almost nine, and she had only a minute or two to stay this morning.

Chérie laughed happily. "*Mais oui*, they have not finished that box . . . and when one does not write many letters, it takes such a long time . . . and this other letter is from Madame Wolfson. . . ."

"Yes, I thought so . . . but read the pink one . . .

the twins are so refreshing. I delayed purposely to bring your mail. . . . I saw the pink envelope when the bag was emptied, and was pretty sure. . . ."

"Dear Friend," began Chérie, leaning a little forward, to get a better light on the page she was reading, "I hope this finds you and your cousin Nell in the best of health."

"That must have cost quite an effort," Nell broke in, "considering their antipathy to me."

"We are all well," went on Chérie, without noticing Nell's comment, "but your Aunt Eliza has been very sick. We saw the doctor coming out as we were driving by their house the other day, and Pop asked him because you girls might like to know. And I thought he said the circus was past. And I looked at Dot and Dot looked at me, because we did not think there was a circus in town but Pop says the word was crisis. So I guess it was my mistake, and your aunt will get better after it, whatever it was."

"After that, she should," interposed Nell, still laughing.

"White Sox and Billy-Jo-cat are very great friends. White Sox fights his battles. And we are sending you another barrel for Christmas."

Chérie looked up at Nell in dismay. "Another barrel," she repeated, "what shall we do with it, Nell?"

Nell laughed. "I'm sure I don't know . . . perhaps the ladies can dispose of it. . . ."

"*Bien sûr*," nodded Chérie, "and so many women, old and young, come here for alms. I have seen them waiting in the side hall . . . and Sister Scott treats them as children . . . praising, scolding, but always filling their baskets."

Sister Scott was very old, the daughter of a Canadian farmer. She had entered as a lay sister, years and years ago, and had brought in with her all her

natural shrewdness. And quite often she had penetrated the shams practiced by the "dear poor" as the ladies of the *Sacré Cœur* called the mendicants who came to them for aid, and acquainted the mesdames of these impositions. But to no purpose. The mesdames would not listen. They possessed all the European tolerance for beggars, and in their pity did not look for perfection among life's derelicts.

"Well, little cousin," said Nell, "I must run away, now . . . it is almost nine."

"And this letter," and Chérie opened the gray envelope, "would you not like to hear what Madame Wolfson has to say?"

"Another time, Chérie . . . I must fly. . . ."

And so Chérie read Katherine Wolfson's letter to herself, and *le petit tigre* blinked and purred unnoticed on the window seat, in the sun.

"My dear little friend," she wrote, "I am in receipt of your very interesting letter. I knew that you would be happy at the *Sacré Cœur*, still it was a great pleasure to me that you realized it, yourself. Be sure and take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself to perfect yourself in the Art you love. You will find Madame Travers always ready and willing to help you, but your success depends on yourself, Chérie. . . ."

"*Ah, Hélas!*" she murmured, "the thought weighs me down. . . . Suppose I fail . . . what would Madame Wolfson say. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

Doubts and Fears

It was a week later. Madame Travers was standing before an easel when Chérie entered the studio. A slight limp was the only evidence of her recent unpleasant experience, and she carried a cane to enable her to walk. The sound of the tap, tap, on the hardwood floor as she advanced made Madame turn toward her.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle,*" she welcomed, smiling.

"*Bonjour, madame,*" returned Chérie, with a little inclination of her head, "am I intruding?"

"Not at all, my dear child. . . . I am so glad you came, I have something to say to you. A few days ago I received a letter from a mutual friend of ours, filled with queries as to your progress."

"Ah, Madame Wolfson," exclaimed Chérie, "I, also, had a letter from her"; and again she could see the words, "your success depends on yourself," in Katherine Wolfson's fine handwriting across the top of the pale gray page, and again she became conscious of her littleness . . . the slipping away from her of the blessed self-confidence that had been hers since babyhood.

"Yes, she is so interested in you and your work, mademoiselle. How delighted she would be if your canvas won the prize in the coming contest . . . as it should."

"Oh, madame . . . you are too good. . . . I am afraid . . ."

"You should have no fear, mademoiselle. . . . God

has bestowed upon you a great gift. . . . He will help you. . . ."

Chérie started. "*Le bon Dieu*!" she murmured, and a little guilty flush crept up, deepening the rose tint in her cheeks. *Eh bien*, and who was she to depend upon herself? Had He not always been her confidence and her strength? What was she without His help? Nothing! . . .

"And have you anything ready to submit, yet?" Madame Travers was saying gently, "have you thought of anything?"

"*Mais non, madame*," Chérie answered, "I have no thought yet. . . . I am so very slow . . . but a tiny little inspiration shall come . . . and then . . . *n'est-ce pas*?"

Madame Travers laughed. "Then we shall see what we shall see . . . and in the meantime, look at this sketch. . . . Does not Mademoiselle Cameron do excellent work?"

Chérie turned and gazed at the pictured scene, a pleased light in her dark eyes. A lovely bit of woodland in watercolor; the setting sun gorgeously tinting trees and underbrush.

"*Bien sûr, madame*, her work is wonderful," she praised.

"Yes, you will have to look to your laurels, my dear child," warned Madame Travers, hoping to spur on Katherine Wolfson's young protégée by rivalry; wishing to awaken the artistic possibilities in this very promising pupil; realizing, fully, Chérie's superiority to Lorna Cameron, the only contestant to be feared or reckoned with, in the whole class. "Mademoiselle Cameron is working very conscientiously. . . ."

"*Mais oui, madame*," Chérie said, enthusiasm in voice and manner, "her sketch shows it . . . her picture will be beautiful. . . ."

Madame Travers stared at her, surprised. What

kind of a girl was this . . . with neither envy nor jealousy in her mind . . . according the most generous praise to her rival's work and ability? No wonder Katherine Wolfson loved her! She was so sweet, so unselfish!

A little later Chérie was resting in the infirmary, where she was still treated as a patient by Sister Moran. The trip to the studio had been the greatest distance she had as yet attempted, and she was quite proud of the accomplished feat.

For the past two days she had been a sort of free lance, going about when and where she pleased, endeavoring to gain strength in her ankle by judicious exercise in order to be able to attend her classes the following week.

"But how strange it is," she murmured to herself, after Sister Moran had left her to her own devices, "that nothing comes to me . . . no matter how I try, I see only Nell's face . . . now smiling, now sad, but always Nell . . ." which was not so strange, when one considered the number of sketches she had made of her cousin.

And then, quite suddenly, she thought of one in particular. One she had done in Central Park, last June before Aunt Lottie died. Nell, in a dress as blue as her eyes, weaving together the daisies dotting the green grass at her feet.

"*The daisy chain,*" she cried, and the words startled her, so strained and unnatural were the tones of her voice. "At last, it has come to me . . . that thought . . . and it brings with it, the name. . . ."

. . . .

A day or so later, Chérie went to the study hall in search of Nell and Betty. They had told her they would be there after *goûter.*

"Both of us have letters to write," Betty had confided, "and we might as well get them off our minds . . . and it's raining . . . so we couldn't go out, anyway. . . ."

And the rain was still coming down in torrents, lashing against the windows in gust-driven fury, darkening the room enough to make the turned-on lights a necessity.

"Oh, here she is now," cried Betty, as she caught sight of Chérie in the doorway, and with one of her sudden little rushes she was beside her in an instant, putting a protecting arm about her and leading her to the chair Nell had just placed for her cousin's comfort.

"*Eh bien*, I am always a trouble," apologized Chérie, "and now I stop you writing."

"Oh, I'm only writing to Gerald," said Betty, "and it's not so very important. . . . I told him I would send him a letter every month, and he's still waiting for the first . . . so it really wouldn't hurt him to wait a little longer. . . ."

"Oh, of course not," derisively from Nell, "what he's never had he cannot possibly miss. . . ."

"*Mais non*, Betty," interrupted Chérie, earnestly, "you must not disappoint your brother. . . . He might be depressed . . . your letter might cheer him . . . one never knows."

"Mademoiselle Desmond is wanted in the parlor," announced Madame Fargot from the platform, after listening to a whispered message from Sister Thompson, "and you may bring Mademoiselle Lawson and also Mademoiselle Brooks with you."

And all of a flutter they followed Sister Thompson from the room; and wild and varied were the conjectures that came into their minds. Who was it? Who could it be? Why had they come in all the rain?

"Tell me who's down there," coaxed Betty, voicing her intense curiosity, "and I'll love you for it."

But Sister Thompson just pursed her thin lips together, and would not answer. She was enjoying the situation. She had a certain sense of humor; the grim humor of the very old, amused by the senseless enthusiasm of a younger generation. What a fuss they make over nothing! What a mountain out of a mole-hill!

Not that she thought either Dr. Donovan or his good wife had any resemblance to a mole-hill. Far be it from Sister Thompson to class such fine people with anything so loathsome. But, be that as it may, Aunt Lou and Uncle John proved to be the waiting visitors.

And Betty, with a little inarticulate sound of greeting, flew into her aunt's arms, leaving Chérie and Nell standing in the doorway.

"My little Betty," murmured Aunt Lou, kissing her, "how you have grown. . . . I can hardly believe my eyes . . . you were so tiny when I saw you in New York. . . . How old were you then, Betty?"

But Betty did not answer. She was crying; the great tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Why, Betty," in perturbed tones from her aunt, "what is wrong, dear. . . . Why do you cry?"

"I—I—c-can't h-help it," she sobbed, lovingly patting the sweet face, so close to her own, "you look just like Mother . . . and . . ."

"But Betty, dear, you forget that I have not met your friends, and I have heard so much about them," reminded Aunt Lou, wishing to turn her thoughts into another channel. Betty was homesick! Anyone could see that! And the resemblance between the sisters, Aunt Lou and her dear mother, had completely broken down her self-control.

And Betty turned her tear-dimmed gaze on Chérie and Nell. She was ashamed of such apparent lack of courtesy, such childish behavior. "Oh, I am so sorry," she apologized.

"Umph, and what about me?" demanded Dr. Donovan, in seemingly high dudgeon, after the belated introductions to Aunt Lou had been effected. "I'm horribly jealous. . . . Why, you ignored me, Betty . . . absolutely ignored me . . . but I'll get even with you, young lady. . . ."

"But Uncle John," expostulated Betty, somewhat dismayed by this heretofore unheard-of belligerency in genial Dr. Donovan; "I saw you before . . . while Aunt Lou . . ."

"I'll get even with you," he repeated, "I'll prescribe for you . . . and your friends must share the medicine," and now his eyes were twinkling, "but you must all come to my office, first."

Aunt Lou laughed. "All of which brings us down to the reason that enticed us here, on such a rainy, rainy day. In plain English we came to invite you, Betty, and these two young ladies to have Thanksgiving dinner with us next Thursday . . . and we have obtained Mother Vernet's consent, so I hope you will accept. . . ."

"Accept," repeated Betty, "I hope you didn't think we'd refuse? We are not as foolish as that!" And Chérie and Nell joined in the general laugh that followed, at Betty's expense.

And so it was settled. Uncle John intended to call for them about noon, Thursday, and bring them back before nine that night. Aunt Lou was delighted. She felt a little guilty about Betty. In a way, she had neglected her. Of course, the children's recent illness, and the thousand and one duties of a busy housewife and mother, could be offered as excuses . . . but

how about little homesick Betty, craving for a glimpse of her mother's face?

. . . .

Thanksgiving Day dawned clear and bright, with frost in the air, and the drive to the big, square corner house in the center of the town proved a delight to the three girls. From afar they had seen the swinging sign, with "Dr. J. H. Donovan" in gold across it, telling the world that his office was on the premises. But they passed the door under the swinging sign and rounded the corner, where, grouped about the gate the six little Donovans were watching for them. And merrily they escorted their guests up the path to the big front door which their mother was holding open, waiting to receive the expected visitors.

"Din—ah am suvved, Mis' Donovan!" announced Old Pete, the colored man. Pete was the doctor's man-of-all-work, doing odd jobs about the place of any and every description, and was, like many others of his race, a natural actor. To-day he was called upon to perform the duties of a butler, and a butler he was to all intents and purposes, making the most elaborate gestures; putting on all kinds of airs as he served the "quality" as he called the Donovans and their guests; congratulating himself at the same time at the fine figure he was cutting in the long-tailed, black cloth coat belonging to the doctor. But it was well for his self-esteem that he did not see himself as others saw him, for the doctor was a very large man and Old Pete was stooped and puny, and the aforesaid garment hung from his bony shoulders as it might have hung from a rack, rendering the effect rather grotesque.

Betty giggled, while Chérie and Nell strove to repress their smiles as the over-long sleeves performed

parabolas above their heads. But the Donovan boys took no notice of him, whatever. They were so accustomed to him. He was always garbed in this manner on festive occasions, and to them it was just part of the present ceremony.

"Did you use to live in New York?" suddenly piped a shrill, small voice on her left, and Chérie turned and encountered little Gerald's serious eyes looking up into hers.

"Yes, I did live there," she admitted, smiling. How timid he was! He reminded her of a bird, poised for the instant, that a false move would scare into flight.

"And did you know my cousin Gerald, too?" in tones rather tremulous. Self-consciousness was almost upon him. She must show intense interest in him, or he would say no more.

"I did not know Gerald," she acknowledged, earnestly, "I knew only Betty . . . Gerald was away at college. . . ."

"Ah, he was here last summer," he confided, won by her grave manner, "I'm named after him . . . and I'm going to be like him when I grow up, I betcha I am. . . ."

"*Bien sûr*," nodded Chérie, "you already look——"

But just then an interruption occurred that put a stop to the confidential conversation between the younger Gerald and his newly acquired friend. And the interruption came from further up the table, to the left of Dr. Donovan, who was busily engaged carving the immense turkey before him. Little Joseph had upset the gravy boat, his round horrified eyes, watching the brown patch ever widening on the freshly laundered tablecloth.

"Ho, ho," cried the doctor, attracting the baby's attention on the instant, "look what Daddy found

for Joseph!'' And as he held toward him the wishbone he deftly threw a napkin over the unsightly spot, sending a glance of warning to Old Pete to keep away, and let well enough alone . . . and the day was saved.

CHAPTER X

Christmas Day

It was Christmas Day. The weather was ideal for the season. Cold and crisp with snow everywhere, and still snowing. It had snowed steadily for the past twenty-four hours. Great drifts were massed against the windows, and since dawn the old gardener and his assistants had been busily engaged with shovels, endeavoring to clear a path to the entrance gates through the heaped-up piles along the driveway. The heavily-laden branches of the giant trees moaned and groaned and complained under the weight they had to carry every time the frequent gusts of wind forced them to move about.

"Oh, what fun we'll have," cried Betty, gazing through a spot she had rubbed clear on the blurred glass of the dormitory window. "I wished so for snow . . . and here it is . . . and Uncle John will have to use the sleigh. . . ."

And Chérie looked at Nell, and Nell looked at Chérie. They had both wished the same wish. Snow was all that was needed to make the trip into the country a thing of sheer delight. How happy the Donovan boys would be! How they had described a sleigh ride! The team of big bays their father always drove with the sleigh; the red-trimmed harness, ornate with silver bells; the heavy fur robes thrown over the seats and covering the occupants to their chins, defying the sting of the brisk wind as they flew along the snow-banked roads.

"I don't know what life would be without you," remarked Nell, a trifle jocularly, to Betty, "we'd be anchored here for the day if we weren't friends of yours . . ." which was quite true.

Dr. and Mrs. Donovan had obtained permission from Mother Vernet, a week ago, to carry off the three girls to the old Norton homestead, on the old Norton farm, for dinner on Christmas Day. Not that the dinner would be any better than the elaborate, well-cooked meal served in the convent. Probably it would fall far short of it in every way, but variety is the spice of life and appeals to young or old.

It was now almost noon and the girls had left the festivities going on downstairs to adorn themselves in their best. The Donovans would be here within a few minutes and they would not like to be kept waiting. So, as they bustled about, it was only occasional glances they threw at the presents they had received this morning after breakfast.

But Chérie and Nell couldn't resist surreptitiously patting the fur coat each had found among the lesser articles. And, strange to say, both coats were identical. Yet Nell's father had chosen hers, and sent it to her, while Madame Wolfson was responsible for Chérie's.

"Isn't that a funny coincidence," exclaimed Nell, laughing, " 'two minds with but a single thought' sort of a situation," and then promptly forgot all about it. But Chérie thought of it, again and again, and wondered . . . had Uncle Bob sought Katherine Wolfson's advice on the matter . . . or had it just happened so?

Among the pupils were many whose homes were at great distances, and, as a rule, these girls spent the Christmas holidays in the convent, so Chérie and Nell would not have been without companionship and

plenty of amusement even if the Donovan invitation had failed to materialize.

For Mother Vernet taxed her brains and the brains of the community to entertain the "Christmas guests" as she called those remaining in the house, striving to make things as homelike as possible, especially for the little ones.

On Christmas Eve row after row of stockings had been hung from the high old-fashioned mantel of black and yellow marble in their own recreation room. The stockings were of various sizes and lengths, and all the colors of the rainbow were represented, adding gaily to the other decorations. And the children, thrilled and excited, went to bed to dream of good Saint Nicholas.

So, at daybreak this morning they were all wide awake, waiting for the gong, and no urging was necessary to have them in readiness for Mass. This in itself was wonderful, for, as a rule, lack of concentration is more evident when a child is dressing than at any other time.

The gifts were always distributed after breakfast, and while the older girls were receiving theirs, the little ones were ushered into the recreation room. And in awe they stared about . . . at the bulging, elongated stockings . . . at the enormous cowhide boots, on the wide hearth before the freshly made fire, browned and dried from age and neglect, the snow, that had been sprinkled upon them by Sister Scott, still white and sparkling. Santa Claus had again forgotten his boots!

But their awe soon gave place to curiosity, and then the fun began, and the mesdames and the older girls watched them with the keenest enjoyment—watched the delight, the surprise, the satisfaction, the little jealousies and disappointments of the small un-

conscious actors taking part in this bit of drama; the flickering fire casting flashes of light about the dusky room; darkened by the blanket of falling snow, without.

And Chérie and Nell were laughing now at the remembrance. "Wasn't it fun to watch their faces?" Nell was saying when Betty interrupted.

"I'm sure I hear the bells," she cried, poised, listening, "and I'm right. . . . Hurry up, girls . . . they're here!" and with a wild scramble, she gathered together her wraps, flying out of the door and down the stairs, followed closely by Nell and Chérie . . . struggling into their new fur coats.

Boyish shouts rent the air as the girls were spied bounding down the steps, pulling on their gloves as they came.

"All set?" enquired the doctor, looking back to see that they were well-covered with the fur robe.

"All set," cried the boys, and away the impatient horses flew, gay with red tassels and silver bells, carrying with them the brightly-painted sleigh and its happy occupants.

. . . .

The old homestead of the Nortons was reached from the road by a circular drive, winding around a grove of pines—pines, tall and straight, bending haughtily to the wind, resenting the indignity of compulsion; muttering their discontent in soft whispering sounds.

The house, itself, was low and broad, with a cupola in the center, rising high above the large front door. Small windows pierced the cupola at intervals, showing above the slender railed balcony, following around the tower-like structure.

Great-great-grandfather Norton had designed this himself, and called it the observatory; using it when he wished to view his crops and, by the way, to over-

see his workmen, thus detecting from afar the slackers and the ne'er-do-wells among his retainers.

For Sergeant Norton, from all accounts, was a martinet of the most severe type, ruling his small domain with an iron hand. Born in the northern part of Ireland, austerity was natural to him and he grew up rugged and strong. Before he had attained his eighteenth year he had accepted the "Queen's shilling," an English custom tantamount to enlistment, and was on the high seas with the regiment before he fully realized the step he had taken. But the ship was bound for India, and desertion was death. So he faced the music, and like most of his countrymen, made good; rendering signal service to his Queen and country; acquiring a fortune in precious stones; having this grant of crown land conferred upon him, by the British government. And on this land he had built this house, and lived like a monarch the remainder of his days.

But, at the time, there were no banks in the colony and his money he kept in bags in the house, sometimes doling it out in a miserly fashion, sometimes lavishly, by the handful, uncounted. And as there was no such thing as interest, one can readily understand, how depleted the family exchequer must have been when it came into the hands of his sons and daughters.

And so the grandeur of the old place belonged entirely to the past. The land had been sold, bit by bit, until now but a small farm remained. The house needed repairs, within and without, and only a few of the rooms were used, at present, by Barney Norton and his wife, Mary. In the oak-paneled dining-room, being one of the few, dinner was served. A huge wood fire blazed on the hearth, roaring up the chimney, lighting up fitfully the heavy furniture and

the scowling countenance of great-great-grandfather Norton, framed in gold, above the mantel.

And what a dinner it was! The table fairly groaned under the weight of the "good things" thereon; for Aunt Mary was a marvel in the art of cooking, and Uncle Barney was a marvelous host.

But like all things in this world, whether pleasant or unpleasant, the dinner came to an end, and the hours moved on apace. It was now almost four, and the boys, tired from romping about, were becoming restless. Betty was telling Uncle Barney all about Gerald's good fortune . . . and what a help it had been to all of them.

"And the boy is on the hospital staff, you say, Betty?" he said, between puffs, as he smoked his briarwood pipe, his kind eyes on his niece, "I hope he'll come this summer to us . . ."

And just then, Chérie and Nell came into the room, with Aunt Mary, who had been showing them about the old place, relating many very interesting anecdotes at the same time.

"*Eh bien, ma petite,*" exclaimed Chérie, before Betty could answer Uncle Barney, "you should have been with us. . . ."

"Mary knows some great tales," laughed Uncle Barney, "and she knows how to tell them . . . but I think the boys ought to run up to the observatory and bring us down some corn to pop . . . and you'll find a popper up there, too."

The boys needed no second bidding. With a mad rush, they were off; even little Joseph tagging behind, trying to keep up with his brothers.

"The girls haven't seen the observatory, Betty," remarked Aunt Lou, a little later, "take them up, and show them the view. . . ."

Betty was delighted. She had forgotten all about

the view, and she led Chérie and Nell to a narrow door in the square entrance hall. A bumping sound greeted them. The boys were descending the steep staircase, and the small reddish ears were dropping from their arms. Betty opened the door and waited, stooping to pick up the corn from the floor.

"Go right up, girls," she called to Chérie and Nell, above the din, "and I'll follow as soon as I get rid of this . . . they'd leave it here without a thought . . ."

And a little later, up in the octagon-shaped room, Chérie and Nell, a little breathless, gazed about. A chair was placed beneath one of the windows, and the window was open.

"Bur-r-r, but it's cold here," said Nell, "I wonder why it's open."

Chérie laughed. "Voilà, see the corn on the sill . . . they threw it from the window for fun. . . ."

She paused as a faint gurgle reached her . . . and it had a familiar sound . . . a baby voicing its pleasure. . . . Little Joseph . . . must be somewhere outside that window.

And in the second she was there, thrusting her head through the small aperture beneath the pushed-up sash. One little black strap pump was just disappearing from sight, rounding the observatory, on the frail sagging, age-worn balcony! The Donovan baby was in peril of his life! He must be saved! But how?

Drawing her head in, she turned and beckoned to Nell, holding her breath to prevent the scream she felt was coming.

"What's wrong?" whispered Nell, startled by the anguished expression in her cousin's eyes.

"Little Joseph," she gasped, "he is out there . . . I can save him . . . you must help me squeeze through."

A coil of rope caught Nell's glance near the heaped-up ears of corn and with a bound she had it, tying it fast about Chérie's waist as she again thrust out her head. And then Chérie forced one shoulder after the other through the narrow opening, crawling out, with a prayer on her lips to *le bon Dieu*, the worm-eaten boards quivering and creaking under her weight.

The baby had gone that way, *eh bien*, she must go this, and so meet him. And Nell felt the rope tighten in her hands, and sensed what Chérie intended to do. But suppose the balcony gave way. . . .

"What on earth are you doing, Nell? cried Betty coming into the room, "and where is Chérie?"

"Out there," Nell told her, "trying to save little Joseph . . . she had to go. . . . I couldn't get through."

Betty paled, and a look of terror shot into her eyes. "But the balcony, Nell . . . it's rotten . . . she'll . . . they'll both . . ."

"No, no, Betty, take hold of this rope. . . . If the balcony falls we'll save her. . . . Now, hold tight and brace yourself . . ."

And then the rope began to slacken in her hands . . . she must be returning. . . .

Was she alone?

And quickly they drew in the rope as it gave to them, until Chérie backed past the window enough to thrust the terrified baby through, into Betty's arms.

But Nell grasped Chérie, and held on frantically, while her cousin slowly forced herself in, as she had forced herself out.

And just as Chérie's feet passed over the sill, and Nell was guiding her and supporting her to a safe landing, a sound of ripping and snapping reached their ears. . . .

The balcony had broken away from its moorings, and the thud that followed shook the house to its very foundation.

. . . . .

"What was that?" cried Dr. Donovan, as the sound came to him from above. Something had fallen on the roof! What was it?

"My baby. . . . Where is he?" gasped Aunt Lou, glancing wildly around and at the five larger boys standing about the fireplace. But the boys did not know. . . . Maybe he was in the observatory . . . the girls were up there. . . .

And with a dash, she was fumbling at the door in the hall, leading up to the observatory, but the doctor was beside her on the instant, and with his strong arm about her, she stumbled blindly up the steep, narrow steps. . . . Uncle Barney and Aunt Mary following with the boys, dimly conscious of the tragedy in the air about them. . . .

. . . . .

And Chérie was a real, live heroine!

The story of the rescue had been told by Betty, from beginning to end, after she had surrendered little Joseph to his mother. And thanks and blessings had been showered upon Nell, as well as Chérie, by the Donovan baby's grateful relatives, realizing the great help Nell had been to her cousin throughout the thrilling adventure.

But Chérie had risked her life! Death had stared her in the face from the moment she had crept out upon the balcony, until she had crept back again! And she had been so brave . . . so wonderful. . . .

"You saved my boy," said the doctor, his kind eyes beaming gratitude upon her, "and I . . ." He turned away. He could say no more . . . a gripping sensation was closing his throat. . . .

"Oh, Chérie, you saved my baby," sobbed Aunt

Lou, tears falling from her eyes, splashing down on little Joseph's curly head; and she pressed him closer in her arms, dreading to let him go from them again.

And Chérie gazed at her, a strange light in her dark eyes, and murmured gently, "*Le bon Dieu* saved him . . . not I. . . ."

CHAPTER XI

The Reward of Merit

The time allotted to the festivities of Christmas and the first day of the incoming year was fast drawing to a close. Classes would be resumed the following Monday, as usual, and the pupils were making the most of every precious moment remaining of the happy, care-free days.

And just now they were enjoying themselves to the fullest extent possible, flying about on their glittering skates, their multi-colored scarves floating behind them, fluttering in the bitter wind from the north like so many pennants; giving a gala appearance to the devotees of the great outdoor sport, circling round and round the smooth, snow-framed sheet of ice that Roderick had wasted hours on, in the cricket field, near the kitchen gardens.

Roderick was mighty proud of this particular piece of ice, so, probably, did not consider his time wasted, at all. Roderick was the old Scotch gardener, dour and silent, without; trying to hide from the world in general, his kindly, sympathetic nature. Work mattered nothing to him if the result gave pleasure to others. So, he had dug out and banked the snow around, forming an enclosure, which nightly, he flooded from the nearby Artesian well. And many times during the day he had swept it; clearing away the snow almost as it fell; until now, it was like glass, without an uneven spot to mar its surface. And how he had listened to hear the girls' comments, voicing their surprise, their delight, their satisfaction; his

grim lips closed together in a straight line . . . his drawn brows denying the twinkle in his gray-green eyes, under the shaggy, red and black plaid cap he wore! And he went away, where multitudinous duties called him to other parts of the grounds, apparently quite unconcerned about either the girls or the skating rink.

It was almost noon. Presently, they would be summoned to the midday meal. Chérie and Nell were gliding about, hand in hand, glancing around, every now and then, to see if Betty had yet materialized.

"Let us wait here until she comes," said Nell, steering her cousin into the banked-up snow; "what in the world is she writing about that could take all this time. . . ."

"*Eh bien,* she wished to let them know at home about little Joseph . . . and all that happened Christmas Day," Chérie told her, swaying a bit from the almost too-sudden stop.

"Oh," exclaimed Nell, and then paused, staring unseeingly at the gayly-clothed figures flying past, for a minute or so. Well, Betty had something to write about! "But I wonder what did happen to old Sergeant Norton's bag of gold?" she flung at Chérie, turning perplexed eyes upon her, at the same time.

"What gold?" asked Chérie, startled.

"The gold Aunt Mary told us about when she showed us his treasure room, under the stairway . . . don't you remember?"

"*Bien sûr* . . . she told us many stories. . . ."

"But only one about gold," retorted Nell, somewhat provoked, "the bag of gold that disappeared just before the old man died . . . it had never even been opened, and no trace of it has ever been found. . . ."

"*C'est bien,* Betty is here, at last," interrupted Chérie, and the next moment, Betty was making

voluble excuses, accounting for her prolonged absence, while she quickly adjusted her skates. In a few minutes the bell would ring. She must make the most of the short time left.

"I just had to answer Aunt Lou's note," she was saying as her two friends whirled her out upon the ice, "the note I got from her, this morning . . . and she sent you both her love."

"She's a dear," praised Nell, "I'll never forget her when you put little Joseph in her arms. She was like the Madonna in the reception room . . . the same expression in her eyes . . . about her lips. Did you notice it, Chérie?"

"*Mais oui,*" returned Chérie, gravely, "she was also filled with the great love for *le bon Dieu* . . . for His mercy." She paused, a reminiscent light in her dark eyes, remembering the piteous, half-suppressed sobs of the poor mother, clasping the wriggling little body to her heart, realizing fully the sorrow she had been spared.

"But she thanks you, too," cried Betty, impulsively putting her arm about Chérie, and almost upsetting her.

"*C'est bien,*" exclaimed Chérie, after a brief series of contortions, endeavoring to regain her lost balance, "but I was only His instrument . . . as you both were, also. . . ."

Nell laughed a little. "But you are the heroine, Chérie . . . you must admit that . . . the honor is all yours, so you might as well submit to the inevitable praise and adulation that will be showered on you by an admiring public, with as much grace as you can assume."

"How you say things, Nell," protested Chérie, but she knew it was the truth. And the openly expressed commendation and admiration she encountered, embarrassed her. She felt that she was in a

false position. She wished there would be no more said about it. Useless wish! When the other girls returned, they would be told of the rescue . . . and that would mean . . . more praise for her, instead of praising *le bon Dieu*. . . .

"Aunt Lou is so worried," said Betty, breaking in upon her thoughts, "and she can't make out what is causing the trouble."

Chérie glanced at Betty, perplexed. What did she mean? "Worry, trouble," she repeated, "what are you saying, Betty?"

"Yes, what is she worried about?" queried Nell, also plainly puzzled, "I wasn't paying attention, I guess. . . ."

"Oh, she's worried about Uncle Barney and Aunt Mary," answered Betty, a trifle petulantly. She was conscious of a feeling of irritation. She loved the dear old couple, and did not like to associate unhappiness with them, even in her own mind. "Uncle John was out to see them yesterday," she went on, "and he thought they seemed so silent and depressed. He didn't like to question them . . . they're not the kind one can, you know."

"Then they are not ill . . . it has nothing to do with their health?" asked Nell, in surprise.

"Oh, no," returned Betty, "they are both in good health . . . no, it's something else . . . probably something to do with the farm. I heard Uncle Barney say last year's crops weren't so good. . . ."

. . . . .

And so the days passed, and back came the pupils from their homes, filled with tales of adventures that instantly paled into insignificance at the first recital of Chérie's heroism. How flat, stale, and unprofitable sounded descriptions of balls, parties, concerts, and plays, in comparison with the thrilling rescue of a real live baby from the very jaws of death! And to

think that Chérie Lawson, whose pictures had graced the front pages of the local journals under heavily leaded captions of recognized bravery, was of their own school . . . that they knew her. . . . Why, it was wonderful . . . simply wonderful!

To-day was the first Monday in January. All had settled down to the regular routine, and Primes was to be held in the study hall, as usual, this afternoon.

"Primes" as it was called, was but another name for "Assembly," and was always held the first Monday in each month. The cards with "*Très Bien*" written across them, the medals and the ribbons, were bestowed on the deserving ones whose work of the preceding month was satisfactory; while the undeserving guiltily accepted the cards with only "*Bien*" beside the name, from the mother superior, their eyes averted, their cheeks flushed. And the Reverend Mother would gaze at the delinquent kindly, as each in turn curtsied before her, in acknowledgment of the documentary evidence of her shortcomings.

To those on the outside there is apparently but a slight difference between the meaning of the word "well" and the words "very well," but to the pupils of the Sacré Cœur the difference was a terrible chasm, dug by laziness, inattention, and disobedience. So, it was not at all strange that such a card caused the recipient to blush for shame. As a matter of fact, such a manifestation of confusion delighted the teachers. It was an indication of hurt pride that might possibly react in better work for the future.

And to-day, December's merits and demerits were to be bestowed. The mother superior and the mesdames filed into the hall, and to their places on the platform, where chairs were arranged for them in a semicircle. The pupils standing, their desk chairs turned about, curtsied, and at a signal from one of

the mesdames, seated themselves, each before her own desk, facing the platform.

On a small table placed before the central chair, the bright ribbons, the gleaming medals, and the tray of cards, were arranged, for the convenience of Mother Vernet in distributing them, and eagerly, the girls awaited developments. Who would receive a ribbon . . . a medal?

But they were not held long in doubt. The mother superior was not one to lose time. She believed in performing any task, quickly and well.

So without any unnecessary delay she motioned to the madame in charge to proceed with the names, and smiled graciously as each girl came forward to claim her card and whatever honor was in store for her.

And presently, Nell was receiving a pink ribbon . . . and then Chérie followed . . . the mother superior, herself, arranging the crisp silk on each one, drawing it crosswise from shoulder to waist, tying deftly the knot, allowing the ends to hang free.

"I am so pleased with you, mademoiselle," Betty heard Mother Vernet say when her turn came, "you have succeeded in making good your promise . . . your work is excellent . . . despite that month you lost." And then she saw the gleam of a medal on her black dress and knew she was an honor pupil, at last.

Now the table was cleared with the exception of a small velvet covered box, and a sheet of paper that Madame Travers had just placed there, on which was written about six or seven names.

"My dear young ladies," commenced Mother Vernet in her clear tones, after glancing at the paper that she now held in her hand, "this list has just been completed by Madame Travers, and contains the names of her pupils whose sketches have entitled them to enter the coming contest. As you all know," she

went on, "Madame Travers is a distinguished artist, and she has given to us of her genius and technique, fully and freely. Such generosity can never be repaid, but in appreciation of her work, I shall bestow a gold medal, in her honor, on the winner."

Among the names was that of Chérie Lawson!

Chérie closed her eyes a second. Her head seemed to whirl about. Her sketch, "The Daisy Chain" had been accepted! What would Nell say? How surprised she would be, to see herself on canvas! How wonderful it would be to win that medal of gold honoring Katherine Wolfson's friend! Katherine Wolfson, her benefactress, the woman who had thought it worth while to help her! The woman through whose generosity her dreams would come true! *Eh bien,* she must win! There was no other way she could show her gratitude to her . . . no other way. . . .

Suddenly, she became conscious of a strange silence about her . . . a tense silence that seemed to be in the air. She glanced up. The girls were all gazing intently toward the platform, eagerly waiting to hear Mother Vernet's next announcement. Mother Vernet was standing erect beside her chair, holding the small velvet covered box in one hand, while, with the other, she enjoined silence; her silver cross gleaming against the black of her cape, in the wintry sunlight slanting through a window on the other side of the room.

"I have another surprise here, young ladies," she said, smiling, "a beautiful souvenir for a brave deed. The grateful parents of the child who was saved from death wish to acknowledge their appreciation of the heroism of one of your number . . . Mademoiselle Lawson, come forward."

Somehow Chérie struggled to her feet and obeyed the command. The meaning of it all seemed vague, and, like one in a dream, she saw something pinned

on her pink ribbon by the white slender fingers, that had beckoned her on.

But afterwards, in the recreation room with the girls all crowding about her, demanding to see the pin, showing one another the inscription upon it, she realized fully, the honor paid her by little Joseph Donovan's father and mother.

And so, there was no further mention of the contest until the following morning, when the pupils were having a spin on the ice, before going up to the study hall—the laughing and chatting girls, passing and repassing each other, circling the pond.

Chérie and Nell were skating together, holding hands and enjoying a desultory conversation, such as the best of friends indulge in, at times; not caring particularly, whether questions were answered or not; just happy to be together, peaceful and content.

And then a whirlwind seemed to envelop them, startling them. But it was only Betty dodging about them, her eyes sparkling, her scarlet cap set jauntily on her curly dark head . . . the very embodiment of health and youth.

"Oh, Chérie," she cried, a tragic note in her tones, as she came between them, "Maisie Blynn says you haven't a chance with Lorna Cameron. She says her work is something wonderful. . . ."

"And so it is, Betty," Chérie declared with conviction, "a lovely bit of woodland she has chosen . . . I saw the sketch. . . ."

"Oh, you did," interrupted Betty, and she looked so downcast that Chérie laughed as she answered,

"*Voilà,* I have not lost yet, *ma petite* . . . it only makes me more determined to win. . . ."

Betty threw her arms about her in delight, almost upsetting Nell who was mumbling something about a "foe being worthy of her steel," not feeling quite

sure of the quotation. "Oh, Chérie," Betty gasped, almost breathless from her manœuvers, "when you say that, I know you'll win."

"Of course, she'll win . . . nobody has a doubt about that," observed Nell, dryly, after regaining her balance, "but you needn't be quite so spasmodic . . . I almost cut the figure eight with a vengeance."

CHAPTER XII

Treasure Trove

"And the golden serpent was worn that night by Desdemona as a girdle," Aunt Mary was saying, and her audience of three listened in flattering silence to the old story of the lost gold.

It was Easter Sunday! An early Easter, old Sister Thompson called it; watching the March wind catching up the stray bits of paper and whirling them about the lawns on either side of the driveway. But the air was mild and springlike despite the little boreal gusts, although snow was still on the ground. The storm of the previous week had left great drifts in its wake, but the sun had gradually melted them down into tiny black-specked patches, in the shady spots about. So, taking all things into consideration it was an ideal day for a motor ride.

And that is just what the Donovans thought, and they had called at the convent and had obtained Mother Vernet's permission to whisk Betty and her two friends out to the Norton farm, to have supper with Aunt Mary and Uncle Barney.

"I have heard my mother tell it so often, that I can almost see it," continued Aunt Mary. "Although she was only a little girl, at the time, the really splendid amateur plays presented by the officers stationed here, made a lasting impression upon her. . . ."

"And who played Desdemona?" asked Betty, as Aunt Mary paused.

"Oh, a young lieutenant, over six feet in height," and Aunt Mary's faded blue eyes twinkled, "imagine

such a Desdemona . . . even Othello had to look up to her . . . but everyone enjoyed it, and helped them as much as possible, lending anything necessary in the way of dress. So when a girdle for Desdemona was in demand, it was not strange that the Nortons supplied it. . . ."

"And did he never give it back?" interrupted Nell, deeply interested in the old lady's recital of the happenings of a bygone age.

"Nobody ever knew," replied Aunt Mary, shaking her head slowly, "perhaps he sent it back, perhaps he didn't, but the Nortons never received it . . . and the next day he left for India with his regiment, and was killed in the first engagement . . . and all chances of recovering the golden serpent with the emerald eyes died with him."

"And the bag of gold has never been found," said Betty.

"No . . . but that is another story. . . ." And Aunt Mary shivered a little and drew her shawl closer about her thin shoulders.

"Betty!" called Jack from the doorway, "Mother wants you and Chérie in the kitchen, at once."

"And doesn't she want me?" asked Nell, a trifle surprised at the evident oversight.

"No, you must stay with Aunt Mary . . . if someone doesn't stay with her, Mother says she'll be poking out there, too," and he marshalled the two girls off toward the kitchen, where Aunt Lou was preparing supper.

Nell smiled and watched them go. Jack was so important, vested with his little bit of authority. She wondered if he would be pompous when he grew up! She hoped not! Pompous people were horrid!

A sigh made her turn and glance around. Doctor Donovan was talking to Uncle Barney in the far end of the room, and the old man looked very much de-

pressed; nervously toying with his pipe instead of smoking it, as usual, casting covert glances toward his wife seated in the big chair before the fireplace, gazing unseeingly now into the flames leaping high up into the wide-mouthed chimney.

"How sad she looks," murmured Nell, pityingly, "how sad they both seem . . . isn't it too bad they can't find that lost bag of gold?"

For some unaccountable reason, Nell had decided that lack of funds was the cause of the dear old couple's depression. Perhaps Doctor Donovan thought so, too . . . and maybe he was trying to find out, now, from Uncle Barney. . . .

She glanced toward the door. She would like to run up to the old observatory just for a minute or so. Nobody would miss her, and she would be back in three shakes of a dead lamb's tail. . . .

So she climbed the steep stairs, and was soon in the small octagon chamber. It was like another world up here, so quiet, so aloof. The few pieces of broken furniture, the heap of red-eared corn . . . nothing had been changed since the day little Joseph had been rescued from certain death by Chérie. Chérie, who had risked her own life on that rotten, worm-eaten old balcony. . . .

She went to the window, through which they had crawled, the baby and the heroine. It was closed now . . . and opening it wide, she leaned out, looking down upon the roof, so far below.

Snow was still in places, here and there, but the broken rails and slender posts were in plain view, piled up in one place on what was probably a lot of débris covered with a light sprinkling of snow.

Evidently, Uncle Barney had removed nothing from the roof. He wasn't able to do it himself, and she had seen no hired man about the place. Maybe he didn't require help . . . still on a farm. . . .

How light that lumber was? Surely, such thin pieces of wood falling on the roof, were not heavy enough to cause such a crash in the impact! And what a crash it had been . . . more like a concussion from an explosion . . . making the floor shake beneath her. Had anything else fallen at the same time . . . something heavy that had been forgotten and left on the balcony?

And steadily she gazed down, her brows drawn together in her effort to see what the rubbish consisted of that upheld the jagged timbers from the roof, directly below the window from which she was reconnoitering.

And then, quite suddenly, she saw them! She was not mistaken. Two green eyes were staring up into hers! Two green eyes, set close together, sparkling and unblinking in the rays of the afternoon sun.

It was the golden serpent with the emerald eyes! The serpent, the young lieutenant had borrowed from the Nortons to complete the costume for Desdemona! After all, he had sent it back . . . and someone had hidden it on the balcony. . . .

She must call Aunt Mary and Uncle Barney, and tell them. But, no, suppose she had made a mistake! She must be sure, first. . . .

So, down the stairs she flew, and met Chérie and Betty in the hall, carrying dishes into the dining room.

"Put those things on the table, as fast as you can, and come out here . . . I have something to tell you," whispered Nell, almost breathless in her excitement; propelling them in her eagerness, toward the dining room door, in rather an ungentle manner.

And they did just as they were told, wondering a little at Nell's peculiar behavior. But later, when they knew what it was all about, they marveled at her extraordinary coolness under such conditions.

At once, Betty thought of the ladder in the barn.

"Nell and I shall each take an end, and Chérie can be in the center," she planned, "the roof is low in places and flat . . . so there is really nothing to hinder us getting up there. . . ."

Which proved to be a fact, but it was not the only fact. The serpent was a fact, also! So were the emeralds that did duty for eyes in the golden head! And so was the iron box, into which was crammed the long lost bag of gold!

It was clear enough to Nell, now, what had caused such a resounding crash, and had made the house shake; the weight of the iron box alone, was sufficient to drag down the balcony, without the added weight of its contents, and it was actually embedded in the shingles.

"Why, it is the greatest wonder in the world," she confided to Chérie, "that it didn't go right straight through this crumbling, old roof. . . ."

"*Mais oui,*" returned Chérie, gravely, "and this is above the dining room . . . where they were. . . ."

. . . . .

But the treasure proved too heavy for the girls to handle, and so Betty was dispatched to bring Uncle John on the scene. And his surprise rendered him almost speechless, as he followed his niece to the lean-to summer kitchen at the back of the house, where they had placed the ladder; and in a sort of daze he mounted to the roof.

And still a little bewildered, he glanced around. Betty was running up the slant to the higher level of the house proper, and Chérie and Nell were looking down at him, beckoning him on.

"Oh, hurry, Uncle John," called Betty, "do come and look at it."

And Dr. Donovan followed, the slippery shingles

yielding in places under his weight, making caution imperative.

"Well, well," he chuckled, regaining his voice at sight of the glittering mass exposed to his view where the bag had burst open, "I'll bet a doughnut that's the Nortons' lost treasure. . . . What will Uncle Barney say? Poor old Uncle Barney, I'm glad he'll benefit by it, anyway! But who found it?"

"Nell found it," answered Betty, promptly, "tell him how, Nell."

"I saw it from the window in the observatory," obliged Nell, pointing upward, at the same time, "I was leaning out, looking down at the broken parts of the balcony, and I saw two green shining things staring up at me! At once, I thought of the serpent with the emerald eyes that Desdemona had worn for a girdle, and which had never been seen since . . . but I did not like to tell you about it, at first . . . after all, it might have been imagination . . . so I asked the girls to come with me, and make sure. . . ."

"And we were that excited, weren't we, Chérie?" interrupted Betty, still anything but cool, "and I thought of the ladder and . . ."

"Well, well," muttered the doctor, shaking his head, "and all this has been here, since Christmas Day . . . and if the house had been sold . . . or if workmen . . . well, well. . . ." And putting his hand in among the gold pieces, he drew forth a few pages of age-discolored paper, closely-covered with handwriting, and the letters somewhat illy-formed and angular, sprawled clumsily across the yellowed background of the scraps he was holding before his amazed eyes. "Why, old Sergeant Norton wrote this, himself . . . I've seen his signature often on some old deeds Lou has in her desk. . . ."

"Then it must have been his diary, Uncle John," said Betty, "look at the dates. . . ."

"Surest thing you know, little wiseacre," coincided Uncle John; "it is a diary. So let us see what he has to say for himself." And with the girls listening intently to every word he uttered, he read the following:

"September 10th—That young harum-scarum Lieutenant Denby brought back the serpent. He wore it last night for a girdle when he was play-acting. I took it from him—I'll put it in the bag with the gold. It must be valuable or that black prince wouldn't have fought so to keep it. Well, I gave him no quarter ——

"September 11th—The cache is finished. I'll slip the iron box in and seal it up. It is directly under the window and I can work on it from the inside. I would not risk my life on that balcony. Nobody would, so the gold will be safe enough.

"Well, I crammed the bag into the box along with the serpent, this morning, and that settles that. I have no fear now, I have plenty to live on—the others can look out for themselves ——

"September 15th—My son John missed the bag of gold, and made a great to-do about it. He is looking everywhere, but he will never ——"

That was all! Evidently he had torn out the pages, hurriedly; opening up the treasure box again to dispose of them; fearing that his son might sometime find his book and read what he had written. Clearly he had suddenly realized that his fortune was dwindling, that the gold remaining would soon be used by his luxury-loving family, and the dread of dying in want had obsessed him to such a degree that he determined to off-set such a calamity by the only means within his power.

"Poor old codger," said the doctor, reflectively, "money doesn't always spell happiness."

"*Eh bien,* it will be so good for them . . . the dear

old uncle and aunt," interposed Chérie, her eyes sparkling, "they shall be happy, *n'est-ce pas?*"

. . . . .

It was nearing nine. A beautiful moon serenely shed its white brilliancy down upon the earth, and upon the Donovans' high-powered car, speeding along the road toward town.

The wind no longer came in boisterous gusts, only a gentle soughing in the bare branches of the trees proclaimed that it had not ceased entirely, and gave promise of further activities on the morrow.

The doctor, at the wheel, looked straight ahead. Baby Joseph was fast asleep in his mother's arms and little Tom leaned close to Betty, staring manfully at the back of his father's head, to keep his eyes open, the strained lids fluttering every now and then, in spite of his repeated efforts. Chérie and Nell listened in amused silence to the four older boys, chattering among themselves about the finding of the bag of gold, their awed voices indicative of the thrills they had just experienced.

"I shall never forget the expression on Uncle Barney's face when he saw that money," Betty was saying as she turned to them, "and Aunt Mary . . . well, I just had to cry myself, when I saw the tears on her cheeks . . . and her lips trembling. . . ."

Uncle John slowed down a trifle, glancing at his niece over his shoulder. "It was enough to get anybody going," he muttered, "I felt it . . . just think, the old place was to be put up at auction next month. Uncle Barney had just refused my help, said I had a family to support, that the place was so heavily mortgaged I'd never get my money out of it . . . and you rushed in . . . and then we brought in the gold to them. . . ."

"And they want to do something to show their

gratitude," broke in Aunt Lou, "some charitable thing. . . ."

"Oh, we settled that," smiled the doctor, "they are to make a donation to St. Joseph's Hospital. . . ."

"Oh, how happy that will make Sister Ambrosia," exclaimed his wife, "now she can furnish the new wing. . . ."

"She will be able to do more than that . . . for the donation happens to be the golden serpent," the doctor went on, "but they intend having one of its emerald eyes pried out, before giving it to the good sisters. . . ."

"How strange," ejaculated Aunt Lou, "why?"

"To have it set in a ring for a certain young lady of our acquaintance, who has very good sight and a very alert mind. . . ."

"*C'est bien,*" cried Chérie, half-rising in her excitement, "it is for Nell, the emerald eye . . . *n'est-ce pas?*"

CHAPTER XIII

The Rivals

May had come in a most sweet and gracious mood. The lilacs were in blossom, filling the air with their fragrance. The English violets and the lilies-of-the-valley, growing about the grounds in little nooks here and there, peeped out shyly from their glistening leaves and added their scented breaths to the gentle breeze rustling the grass around them. The sky was a dome of heavenly blue, cloudless, serene, a fitting background for the brilliancy of the mid-day sun.

Over in the orchard the trees were a mass of bloom, pink-tinted, creamy-white bunches, crushed together in their abundance, flecking the grass beneath with their falling petals, promising the usual wonderful yield of rosy-cheeked apples for the coming season.

"*Voilà,*" cried Chérie, in sheer delight, glancing about, clasping her hands together, "oh, Nell, how lovely!"

Nell looked up from the book she was reading but her eyes remained on her cousin and there was speculation in their gaze as she answered, "Yes," adding abruptly, "what about your picture, Chérie? Or should I say, my picture . . . after all it is a picture of me."

"*Bien sûr,*" she assented, readily enough, "it is, Nell . . . but not quite as you are . . . the expression about your mouth, I do not get as I like. . . . It is so fleeting . . ."

"You don't say so," and Nell pretended surprise, "I didn't think it was quite as bad as that."

"As bad as that," echoed Chérie with a quick, puzzled glance at her cousin, and then she smiled. Nell was jesting again. "*Eh bien,*" she continued, "if I could only paint you as I see you . . ."

"Don't let failure along that line discourage you," interrupted Nell. "Maybe you are doing something much better . . . but I haven't heard you even mention it, lately, and I was beginning to think you were letting Lorna Cameron and her friends overawe you, with their comments on technique, superior treatment and all that nonsense. Why, they don't even know what they are talking about."

"*Non, non,* they cannot know . . . nobody sees our work but those in the contest, and we are not to speak of it outside the studio. . . ."

"Then Lorna Cameron sees your work . . . and you see hers?"

"*Mais oui,* and some days I think I have it as it should be, and other days it looks all wrong. . . . *Hélas,* it is discouraging."

"And Lorna Cameron . . . has she her dark days, too?"

"She does not say . . . she just works and works . . . and her work satisfies her . . . and it should, it is beautiful. . . ."

"Umph," ejaculated Nell, reflectively. Evidently, Lorna Cameron was of the self-satisfied type. But why was Chérie so lost in admiration whenever she spoke of this girl's canvas? Was it so wonderful? Would Chérie be relegated to second place, after all? She hoped not, but one could never tell. Chérie had declared that she would win! And perhaps she would. But why did she not speak more of her own work? And why shower such praise upon her only rival?

It was almost one by Nell's watch. For the past

half hour the cousins had been strolling about. Betty had not joined them, as usual. Betty could not. Betty was otherwise employed. This week she was official reader during the noon meal, and she felt quite proud of the honor bestowed on her. She occupied the chair placed on a table at one end of the refectory, as a queen might occupy a throne.

The sundry drawbacks attached to the position, she ignored. To her, it mattered not at all that she had to wait a full half hour for the appetizing viands the others about her were enjoying. She had been chosen from among them all. So they could enjoy their dinner, and she would enjoy her triumph. Later, she would be waited on assiduously by one of the sisters, and she squelched the first pang of hunger by this happy thought. Others following were endured with grim determination. She wasn't old Sergeant Major Norton's great-great-great-granddaughter for nothing! No, indeed!

And it was on her way out, after her belated meal, that she espied Chérie and Nell, coming toward the house.

"Chérie," she called, "here's a letter for you," waving the missive above her head. "Sister gave it to me."

"*Merci,*" murmured Chérie, taking the letter and glancing at her postmark, "it must be from the Browns."

"Open it and see," urged Nell, "I feel like having a good laugh, and the twins are so funny."

"But this is not from the twins. . . . Mrs. Brown writes, the twins are inconsolable. *Hélas,*" sighed Chérie, "it is such sad news . . . dear old White Sox is dead. . . ."

"Oh," ejaculated Nell, "their nice, big cat, so handsome and so dignified. . . . What happened to him?"

"Read what she says, Nell," and Chérie thrust the letter into her cousin's hand, and turned hastily away.

"As usual," read Nell, "White Sox climbed up to his accustomed nook in the old apple tree, and up there among the apple blossoms he just slept away. And there we found him, quite dead, with the pink-and-white petals scattered over his beautiful fur coat."

"But he was only a cat," said practical Betty, "they shouldn't fret so about an animal . . ."

"But he happened to be some cat," retorted Nell, lapsing into slang.

"*Mais oui,*" approved Chérie, turning, "he was so gentle, so proud, *le gros* White Sox. . . . They loved him best of all their pets, they shall miss him, so . . ."

And Betty stared at her, surprised! She had shed tears for White Sox, also, the tiny drops still sparkled on her dark lashes . . . and even Nell was saddened at his passing. . . . He, without the shadow of a doubt, must have been all Nell inferred when she called him, "some cat". Betty sighed. Of course, there were cats and cats. . . .

The sudden, clang, clang, of the bell broke in upon their thoughts, and White Sox was promptly forgotten by Nell and Betty, but in Chérie's mind he still lingered. Poor White Sox! She had so many sketches of him . . . she would send one to the twins . . . that would please them.

And later, in one of her old drawing books, she found one that was particularly good and appropriated it at once. It was just what she wanted . . . apple tree and all!

But in removing it, she revealed another sketch. A sketch of Nell! A sketch she had made the day Nell

came with her father . . . and Mrs. Wolfson was there. . . .

With a little cry of delight, she picked it up, and held it in a better light. "*C'est bien!*" she murmured, "it is what I wanted . . . the expression about the lips . . . now, I have it, and the girl shall be really Nell," and she hurried to the studio with her prize, running up the stairs, flight after flight, in her eagerness to reach her canvas. If she lost no time, she would have a few minutes to herself, before the others arrived.

But a surprise awaited her! When she entered the studio she found Lorna Cameron busily engaged on her canvas.

"*Eh bien,*" she exclaimed, as she passed the girl, "also, a thought has come to you. . . ."

But she received no answer, unless the furtive glance Lorna threw at her could be so-called. What had happened? She looked flushed, and her hands were actually trembling! Was she ill?

Lorna Cameron was usually pale, and freckles of a light tan were sprinkled plentifully across her rather nondescript nose. Taken all in all she belonged to the "colorless" type. She had hair of a pale shade, pale blue eyes set wide apart, light eyebrows, and still lighter lashes. But she was an artist and had been considered a prodigy as a child . . . receiving yearly prizes for her drawings at art exhibits throughout that section of the country. And she was puffed-up accordingly. So much so, that she had developed temperamental qualities. Nell said she was hysterical, and only wanted to attract attention. But then Nell resented her claim to superiority over Chérie.

And Chérie, knowing this, had carefully refrained from criticizing the girl, at all; although Lorna's attitude toward her was of a patronizing nature mostly, and sometimes rather insolent. At all times, she

stressed her father's great wealth, her hosts of distinguished friends, the praise lavished on her work, on her beauty. . . .

And Chérie had always listened in silence. Poor girl! What disillusionment was in store for her throughout the coming years? What an unhappy disposition to be hampered with during her whole life! *Eh bien,* she was to be pitied, that poor, rich girl!

But she had no time to waste on Lorna Cameron's idiosyncrasies, just now, so, without any more delay, she placed the sketches she was carrying against the canvas on the easel, and took up her palette, and for a few moments she studied the sketch facing her . . . the lately-found sketch of Nell.

"How dare you employ outside help?" came to her in strident tones, startling her, and she turned to look in the angry eyes of Lorna Cameron. "It's against the rules of the contest and you know it."

"Outside help," repeated Chérie, not understanding to what she alluded; and then she noticed the girl's gaze toward the sketch, upright against the canvas.

"Yes," snapped Lorna, with contempt, "outside help. . . . What else could you call it?"

"Not that," objected Chérie, drawing herself up to her full height; a haughty tilt to her dark head. "This sketch is also mine . . ."

"So *you* say," sneered the girl, "but that's not proof."

The color blazed in Chérie's cheeks at the insult. Why, anyone could see the sketch was her own work!

"Young ladies," came sharply from Madame Travers, standing in the doorway, "why are you engaged in this altercation, may I ask?" She was surprised. She had expected only decorum from these, her two best pupils, and they knew talking was not allowed. And such talking! It sounded suspiciously like a quar-

rel between the two girls. She was glad none of the lesser lights were present to witness their fall from grace. "And may I also ask why you are not at your own easel, mademoiselle?" she continued, her eyes on Lorna Cameron.

Sullenly, the girl turned and faced her. "Because, madame, I object to this," snatching the drawing from Chérie's easel and holding it up, "Chérie Lawson thinks rules amount to nothing. . . ."

"Give me that sketch, mademoiselle," commanded Madame Travers, and Lorna Cameron obeyed, glancing triumphantly at Chérie.

Slowly the color receded from Chérie's cheeks, her dark eyes searching Madame Traver's countenance. What had she done? Had she really broken one of the rules? Would she be debarred from the contest for such an infraction?

"Mademoiselle Lawson has broken no rule," declared Madame Travers, very distinctly, "this sketch she did herself, so there can be no objection raised in this case," and she handed the rather dilapidated sheet of drawing paper to Chérie, advising her at the same time to continue along the lines she had mapped out for herself.

Furious were the glances thrown at Chérie by Lorna, but she was compelled to keep silence by the presence of Madame Travers in the room. And Chérie, all-unconscious, absorbed in her work, had the gratification of seeing Nell's sweet expression appear about the pictured lips of the girl on her canvas.

And so day followed day, and now the beautiful month of May would soon give place to the month of roses.

Chérie was putting the finishing touches on her canvas. In less than a week all the pictures were to be turned in. She had done her best, she could do no more. Lorna Cameron had said nothing more about

the sketch, and neither had she. But for some reason, she felt that Lorna intended to make trouble for her, later on. Probably she was only waiting to hear the decision of the judges. If she won the contest, all would be well, but if Chérie happened to be the winner, she would raise an objection, at once, based on the use of the questionable sketch.

And a strange thing had happened! The sketch had disappeared! The sketch in itself was valueless, Chérie had no further need of it; but she wondered what had become of it. Was it wanted as evidence? Or was it destroyed so it could not be used as proof? But she only casually mentioned its loss, keeping all her conjectures to herself. Why bother Nell and Betty about something that might never happen? For even if Lorna Cameron made the accusation . . . what good would it do? Had not Madame Travers declared the sketch Chérie's own work? And who would doubt her testimony? And after all, Lorna might be the winner! In which case, there would be nothing more said about it. And even this contingency did not trouble Chérie. This morning she had received a letter from Katherine Wolfson, a wise, motherly letter, completely taking the sting from possible failure.

"I do not wish you to think I am expecting you to win the prize," she wrote, "that would not be fair . . . and victory or failure would be no indication of your future success. You are very young, my dear little girl, and Madame assures me you have the spark of genius."

"Well," approved Nell, handing the letter to Betty, "I am glad she takes such a sensible view of the situation. That is just it . . . the winning of this little contest would mean nothing outside the walls of this convent."

Betty laughed. "Lorna Cameron thinks it would

. . . and intends to win by hook or by crook. . . . Just watch her.''

Chérie folded Mrs. Wolfson's letter and put it back in its envelope. ''*Eh bien*, she has not yet won, Betty . . . but I am so very glad Madame Wolfson thinks like this,'' holding up the missive, ''I shall not be such a great disappointment to her . . .''

''But you'll win,'' cried Betty, ''you said so yourself. . . .''

''*Bien sûr*,'' returned Chérie, ''I intend to win.''

Nell glanced at her, surprised. It was not in Chérie's nature to boast. Why was she so sure? There must be some reason. Chérie had received splendid training from her father . . . and would notice imperfections very readily . . . maybe she knew that Lorna's work would meet with criticism from the judges. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

Chérie Pays a Visit to the Studio

It was Saturday. All morning the rain had descended in torrents from the grayest of gray skies, drenching the fragile blossoms into blotches of pale coloring against the vivid green of the dripping foliage, ceaselessly streaking the blurred glass in the tall windows with zig-zag lines ever moving downward to trickle in tiny streams on the sills below.

In the study hall, the girls were endeavoring, by every means within their power, to stifle their yawns, bringing tears to their eyes in their efforts. How could anyone study on such a dreary day? It wanted but ten minutes to the recreation hour, now, and many and furtive were the glances directed toward the big round-faced clock above the platform. And, surreptitiously, preparations were going on for an immediate departure to a more enlivening region, anticipating the first clap for dismissal to form into lines, and so escape from their present thraldom.

"Mademoiselle Desmond is wanted in the reception room," announced Madame Duprez, and there was a suspicion of a smile about her lips.

Betty glanced up, startled, wondering a little. Who would come on such a wet day? Probably it was Uncle John, or Aunt Lou! The rain or cold held no terrors for them, evidently. But what was the rush, now? Rising, she curtsied to Madame Duprez, and followed Sister Scott from the room, nodding to Chérie and Nell as she passed them.

Down in the large hall she peeped through the par-

tially opened door, but could see only one side of the room. "I don't believe anyone is in there," she murmured to herself, remembering Madame Duprez's half-suppressed smile, "and I can't imagine what there is to laugh at."

Feeling a trifle irritated, she pushed the door open wide, and, quite suddenly, espied a diminutive form standing on a rug by one of the dimmed, rain-splashed windows. A forlorn little specimen of humanity, his clothes saturated, the water running down into little pools, surrounding his small muddy shoes, the rim of his dilapidated straw hat pulled down beneath his chin, framing his dirt-streaked, rosy countenance.

Betty gasped! It was her small four-year-old cousin, Tom Donovan! How did he come? Why was he here?

"Don't move," she cautioned, advancing toward him, realizing that he had been placed there to save the larger rug. "Now, why did you come?" shaking an admonishing finger at the delinquent. "Did you run away? Tell Betty . . . did you run away?"

"Yeth," he lisped, blinking back the tears her evident displeasure had brought to the large blue eyes.

"And Father and Mother don't know where you are?"

"No," he admitted, the tears now coursing down his cheeks. "They don't know where I are . . . I runned away myself. . . ."

Betty frowned in exasperation. Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Uncle John and Aunt Lou must be about frantic by this time. They would think something had happened to the little fellow. His home was a couple of miles from here. He must have left the house hours ago.

"You are a bad little boy," she scolded, "you shouldn't have come . . . they'll think you are lost."

"I wanted to see you," he whimpered, rubbing his

knuckles into his eyes, "and you don't love Tom any more."

"I do love you . . . but you had no business to come here."

"I did," he cried, his cheeks ablaze. He was angry. The object of his affections was no longer nice to him, "I'm a s'porter of this school."

"A s'porter," repeated Betty, nonplussed. What could he mean?

"Yeth, I gave you money for this school," indignation in his tones, "and the money was in my bank. . . ."

And Betty understood. He was a supporter. He had slipped a bright new ten-cent piece into her hand the week before. She had been telling Aunt Lou the girls were collecting among themselves to buy a present for Sister Thompson, and the little chap had added his mite to the fund, slipping it into her hand when no one was looking their way. Surely, he was a supporter, and she had treated him as an interloper.

"Well, old man, so this is where you are?" and the hearty tones of Doctor Donovan seemed to fill the room as he strode toward his small son, gathering him up in his arms and hugging him to his breast.

"How did you know he was here, Uncle John?" asked Betty, a little later, as Tom, clothed dryly in garments he resented as belonging to girls, was about to depart with his father.

"Sister called me up at once," the doctor answered, "I told her to bring you down to him to keep him happy until I could get him. . . . I was afraid strange faces might terrify him."

Betty winced, and her cheeks burned. She felt guilty. She had not been kind to the little fellow. She had extended to him a very dubious reception, to say the least of it. She had scolded him, blamed him. . . . But after all, children are seldom if ever under-

stood. Their reasons for doubtful behavior and actions are generally banished from their minds, entirely, by the hasty judgment and condemnation of their elders, that allows no margin whatsoever for the viewpoints of their undeveloped brains.

And afterwards to Chérie and Nell, she confided her regret, that she had treated him so harshly, hoping he would forgive her. . . .

"Oh, children are such dears," Nell told her, "when they love you they hold nothing against you."

"*Eh bien*, why did he use the word 'supporters,' Betty?" asked Chérie, somewhat amazed by the apparent cleverness in one so young, "and how did he know enough to apply it?"

Betty laughed. "I told his father what he had done at the time and Tom was listening, well-pleased with himself . . . and Uncle John was so proud of him, and praised him for his generous donation to Betty's school . . . and told him that he was now a supporter. . . ."

"And Master Tom drank in the praise greedily," broke in Nell, "and patted himself on the back . . . he would . . . boys are like that . . . and strange to say, so are the girls. We all love to be commended for what we do . . . I guess that is just human nature. . . ."

. . . .

The rain had ceased, and a gorgeous sunset reddened the western horizon, promising sunshine for the morrow. Supper was over and the pupils were in the recreation room, conversing one with the other in French. Always this half hour was devoted to that language, exclusively, and always to Chérie it was delightful . . . bringing back her childhood . . . her dear little French mother . . . her tall, American father . . . the old studio in Paris. . . .

Chérie sighed. Nell and Betty were standing near

the piano, looking over some sheets of music. *Eh bien*, she would join them! And as she was crossing the room, Lorna Cameron accosted her.

"Well, have you found any more helpful sketches, mademoiselle?" she asked, raising her eyebrows a trifle.

Chérie glanced at her, giving her head the haughty little tilt, so characteristic of Fred Lawson's daughter, and answered gravely in the negative—answered in French, thus rebuking Lorna for breaking the rule, and succeeded in keeping out of her voice the resentment that was seething within her.

And Lorna Cameron had the grace to blush, but she laughed softly, and the laugh had a disagreeable sound. Chérie turned from her, abruptly, cutting short any further chance of continuing the conversation.

"What was Lorna Cameron saying to you, Chérie?" asked Nell, a frown drawing together her brows, "you looked anything but pleased."

"*Hélas*, what a tell-tale countenance I must have," countered Chérie, not wishing to enlighten Nell on the subject. What was the use? Nell would be so angry! And she would force Lorna to apologize . . . and then nobody could help anything, and everything would go wrong. . . .

"Oh, of course," grumbled Nell. "I might have known! You'll never say a word against her . . . or anyone. . . ."

Chérie smiled, and patted Nell's arm lovingly with her small, white hand. "*C'est bien*, there is nothing to say, *ma cousine*. . . . She does not interest me. . . ."

They were now on their way to the study hall, ascending the stairs. Betty had remained below with her class, to learn some French verses for a coming entertainment.

"Well, you do interest her," returned Nell, only half-mollified, "and she shows her dislike to you, quite plainly. . . . She considers you a rival . . . and she is not as generous to you as you are to her."

"Ah, Nell, you and Betty I love. . . . I need no more friends . . . *eh bien*, how could I? You are so good to me . . . but I shall leave you, now, I must run up to the studio."

"To the studio, why?" questioned Nell, surprised.

"I left a sketch of White Sox up there. It is on my easel," she explained, "I found it in an old book of drawings and it looked so natural, I touched it up, a little bit. I shall send it to the twins, Monday."

"But it's too late to go up there alone," objected Nell, "and I cannot possibly go with you . . . I'm due at that lecture, now. Wait for Betty, she'll soon be along. . . ."

"*Mais non*, I have no fear, Nell," she protested, "and Betty may not come so soon . . . and I know every little step of the way. . . . I could go up there, so," closing her eyes in illustration for a brief moment, and then glancing up the stairway to the lighted corridor above.

And Nell, but half-convinced glanced up, also. It seemed bright enough up there! She must be developing nerves. There could be no danger. And laughingly, she pushed Chérie toward the stairs, turning away hurriedly to rush into the study hall. She could stay no longer. She was a minute late, now.

So, up the stairs Chérie ran, alone, and along the corridor. And as she neared the door of the studio, a feeling of nervousness took possession of her. She wished now that she had waited for Betty. All the bravery she had exhibited to Nell, a few minutes earlier, was deserting her, and it was with trembling fingers she felt along the jamb for the key. But it was hanging in its accustomed place. Madame Travers

always locked the door herself, and only the students in her class knew where she hid the key.

Chérie, unlocking the door, touched the button and flooded the room with light. She looked about and sighed a sigh of relief. Her fear had taken wings with the darkness. There was her canvas . . . and there was Lorna Cameron's . . . and ranged about were the canvases of the other contestants, dwindled down now to a half dozen, all carefully covered . . . looking like so many shrouded ghosts in the stillness of the deserted studio.

A little later, Betty came up from the recreation room followed by the other girls. They were also bound for the study hall, and had just reached the foot of the stairs as Chérie was coming down.

"Why, it's Chérie," cried Betty, gazing up at her in surprise, "where have you been, mademoiselle?"

Chérie smiled, and waved the sketch gaily above her head. "I went up to the studio to get this," she told her, "I wish to send it to the twins. . . . It is a picture of White Sox."

"And you went all alone?" queried Betty. "Where was Nell? Why didn't you wait for me, Chérie?"

Chérie laughed and descended the few remaining steps. The girls crowded about her, demanding to see the sketch.

"Let us see this White Sox," they urged, "and tell us about him."

"White Sox was a beautiful big cat," volunteered Betty, taking the sketch from Chérie and holding it high so that all might see, "and the other day he died——" She paused, gazing approvingly at the pictured cat, "Why, it actually looks like a cat, doesn't it, girls?" she went on, glancing about as they all voiced their astonishment.

"*C'est bien,* I like that," pouted Chérie, pretending that she was very much offended, "what did you

expect to see . . . did I not say that it was a sketch of a cat?"

"Oh, yes, I know," stammered Betty in confusion, "but it is so difficult to draw a cat . . . there is nothing definite about them . . . oh, I can't explain it, but I tried it once and the result was funny. It looked more like a porcupine than a cat. . . ."

"Did you get the sketch you went after?" asked Nell, joining the group at the foot of the stairs, "and who said it looked like a porcupine, Chérie?"

And she and Chérie exchanged smiles. She had felt just a little anxious about Chérie during the lecture, and had left the room as soon as she possibly could. Well, all's well, that ends well! Chérie had gone up to the studio alone, and was back again, and had worried herself for nothing.

"I said the cat I drew looked like a porcupine," explained Betty.

"Oh, I don't doubt that, in the least, Betty," returned Nell, "but I mean no offense . . . you ought to see my attempt . . . Chérie, of course, is different . . . and the twins will appreciate this picture of their pet, very much indeed."

"The twins," chorused the girls, curiously, "are the twins your brothers, Chérie?"

"*Mais, non*, they are friends only . . . I have no brothers," Chérie answered, "but they love me as a sister. . . ."

CHAPTER XV

Under Suspicion

The next day was Sunday, and the afternoon brought Doctor Donovan to the convent again; but this time it was to see Nell on special business. Uncle Barney and Aunt Mary had sent him as their messenger to carry the little velvet box, containing the emerald ring, to the girl who had found the treasure; fussily explaining how far short it fell of conveying their appreciation of the happiness she had brought to them.

He had met the old couple, that morning, on the steps leading down from the great carved doors of the cathedral, making their way to their bright new car, parked at the curb; and had gladly accepted the very pleasant mission.

Nell, for once in her lifetime, was completely lost for words! The ring was beautiful! She felt overwhelmed. So, silently and proudly she displayed the glittering bauble to Chérie and Betty, and ejaculations of surprise and delight in French and English soon made up for such an unusual lack of expression, on her part.

"And Sister Ambrosia has done wonders for the hospital with the proceeds from the sale of the golden serpent," he told them, "so it is mighty lucky for all concerned that Nell used her eyes to such good advantage, at that particular time and place. . . ."

And the following morning the terrible discovery was made, the discovery that changed the complexion

of things, completely, for the two leading entrants in the much-talked-of contest!

So, all-unconscious of what the immediate future held in store for her, Chérie gaily carried the package containing the sketch of White Sox, neatly addressed to the twins; and placed it on the mail bag that was in readiness on the hall table for collection, only a few minutes before the deplorable offense was disclosed to all in the studio.

"*Eh, bien,*" she said to Nell, who had accompanied her from the study hall, "how pleased Dot and Dash shall be. . . . I would like to hear them, when they see their pet looking at them. . . ."

"Yes, so would I," returned Nell, "they were so fond of the cat. But here we are at the parting of the ways, you go up, Chérie and I go down . . . so *au revoir, mademoiselle*!"

"*Au revoir,*" nodded Chérie, smiling, looking back over her shoulder as she flew up the stairs. How bright the sun was! The corridors seemed flooded with golden light and through the open windows, above the tops of the trees, how blue was the sky! She felt strangely elated . . . happy . . . and as light as thistledown. . . .

She opened the door and went in. Madame Travers was in her accustomed place, and the pupils were distributed about the room before their easels, preparing for work.

With a little curtsey she crossed the room and pushed aside the covering from her canvas, gazing intently at the result of her many weeks of deep thought and untiring effort. It was finished! To-morrow it would be taken from the studio. . . .

A piercing scream rang through the room, gripping the hearts of the hearers with a great fear. What was it? What had happened?

And instantly, all eyes were turned toward the

spot from whence it had seemed to come, only to gasp in surprise at the sight they beheld; and shuddering as another scream came from Lorna Cameron's lips.

It was Lorna Cameron swaying before her easel, wildly clutching at nothing for support, her face ghastly, her eyes starting from their sockets, staring, horror-stricken at the ruined canvas before her!

Yes, ruined! Absolutely and irretrievably ruined!

Great streaks of bright red paint had been slashed across it, entirely obliterating all trace of the picture beneath; and the beautiful bit of woodland was no more.

The lovely pastoral scene that had grown under her brush, bit by bit forming into the beauty that characterized it, as day after day, she had devoted her time and genius to its accomplishment, would never reach the goal for which it had been painted. Lorna Cameron's picture would not win the prize. The judges would have to award that to another and more fortunate contestant.

And with a groan, Lorna Cameron sank to the floor in a state of almost utter collapse. The girls shrank back in consternation, seemingly helpless in the face of their companion's great grief.

Chérie looked about, wildly. What was to be done? A glass of water on Madame Travers' desk caught her glance, and seizing it she rushed to Lorna's assistance, followed by the others.

Oh, oh, who had done this terrible thing? And why? The questions filled the minds of all present, and were unanswerable. What could be said? It must have happened sometime between Saturday night and Monday morning! Yet the studio was never open Sunday, in fact was always locked by Madame Travers, herself, every Saturday evening; and without fail she hid the key, allowing only the girls of her

class to know where it was placed. Could it be possible that? . . .

"Young ladies," said Madame Travers, nervously, gazing from the startled, dismayed faces about her to the bespattered canvas on the easel, and her tones were husky with suppressed emotion, "I beg of you to be silent about this until we have a chance to unravel the mystery veiling the identity of the perpetrator of such an outrage. So promise me that you will refrain from mentioning it outside the studio. . . ."

And they all intended to do as she wished, but for the distressing incident that followed so closely on Madame Travers' plea for silence.

"Go away from me, Chérie Lawson," came Lorna's angry tones, and the sound of breaking glass, "I hate you. . . ."

And Chérie tottered a little, from the sudden push from Lorna's hand, revealing the broken goblet in a small pool of water on the floor to the startled gaze of the onlookers.

A hush fell on all. The very atmosphere seemed charged with electricity. Lorna Cameron's eyes flashed fury as she stared into Chérie's blanched face.

Chérie's glance wavered, and her lids lowered. What had she done to deserve such treatment? Why did Lorna Cameron stare so at her? Lorna was not herself. She had received a terrible shock. She did not realize what she was doing and saying. She must know how sorry everyone was about her great loss.

"*Hélas,*" murmured Chérie, glancing up timidly at the infuriated, sobbing girl, "it was so beautiful . . . I am so sorry. . . ."

Lorna sprang to her feet, her lips curling contemptuously, "You sorry," she cried bitterly, in broken tones, "you ought to be sorry . . . *you did it.* . . ."

Chérie staggered back, horror in her great dark eyes. "I—I," she stammered, too utterly amazed to

answer this terrible accusation, coherently. What was Lorna Cameron saying?

"Yes . . . you!" repeated the girl, sinking on a chair near her. Her knees trembled under her, she could stand no longer. "You, I said . . . who else . . . who else cared? You knew with my picture out of the way, victory was yours . . . you ——"

Madame's clapper came together with a sharp bang. "Mademoiselle Cameron does not realize what she is saying," she apologized for her, hurriedly, "she has had a shock ——"

"But I do realize what I am saying," interrupted Lorna, rudely, resenting Madame Travers' evident desire to defend Chérie, "and the girls can prove it. She acknowledged in their hearing that mine excelled hers . . . they told me . . . and they also told me of her repeated boasting that she intended to win the prize . . . that no one else would have it. . . ."

"Stop," commanded Madame Travers, peremptorily, "this has gone too far! The class is dismissed! But Mademoiselle Cameron and Mademoiselle Lawson must remain. . . . I have something to say to them."

And the others reluctantly filed out. It wasn't fair! They knew all about it. What was there to hide, now? What more could be said? And they had promised not to speak of it. So, what was the use of turning them out? And grumbling among themselves they descended the stairs.

"I admit, mademoiselle, you have suffered a shock," said Madame Travers addressing Lorna, as the door closed after the last of the outgoing girls, "but you must try to be reasonable. You have made a terrible accusation against a fellow student. An accusation that will stick to her always . . . unless evidence is produced to prove her innocence. And after all, what real proof have you to offer that she is guilty?"

"Her own words," answered Lorna, defiantly, "the girls heard her say again and again, that the prize would be hers . . . that she was sure that no one else could get it. . . . Look at her! She can't deny it!"

Madame Travers turned her glance to Chérie, standing so straight and motionless, and a wave of infinite pity swept over her. How hard it was to fight against such an accusation? How almost impossible to live it down? Unless the real culprit could be found the stigma would cling to her through life. "Tell her, you did not do it, Mademoiselle Lawson," she urged entreatingly, thinking only of the ruined picture.

But Chérie made no answer. She had admired Lorna's work. She had declared that she would win the prize! She could deny neither assertion.

"You see," burst from Lorna, and there was a certain amount of satisfaction in her voice, "she knows she did it . . . she can't deny it."

"Did what?" demanded Chérie, and then she realized in the moment that Lorna was referring only to the defacing of her picture. And a great anger seized her, whipping the blood into her pallid cheeks, filling her voice with scorn. "If you mean that I ruined your picture . . . I say I did not," she flung at the startled Lorna, shrinking before the indignant fury her accusation had aroused, "I never touched your canvas in all my life. . . ."

"I think that is denial, mademoiselle," said Madame Travers, gravely, "and there is no uncertain sound about it. I shall place the case with Mother Vernet, immediately, and it will be investigated . . . and the less we say about it, the better. . . . Now, go to your classes."

. . . .

And like all secrets held by more than one person, the whole tale was soon flying from lip to lip, in class-

rooms, in corridors, any place where two or three girls were grouped together . . . and the story lost nothing in the telling.

And like all gossip, those most concerned were the last to hear it. Nell and Betty were conscious that something out of the ordinary had occurred, but it was almost noon when one, less timid than the others, approached them, recounting the whole miserable story of the accusation.

Furiously, Nell and Betty listened, branding it as untrue! How dare Lorna Cameron accuse Chérie? How dare anyone think that she would do such a thing? It was preposterous on the face of it!

"But why did they fasten the blame on Chérie?" asked Betty, half-dazed by the girl's relation of all that had taken place in the studio, "was it just because Lorna Cameron said so?"

"Yes," was the answer, "at first . . . and then some of us remembered that she went up to the studio after it was locked, Saturday evening . . . and she went up alone. . . ."

"Saturday evening!" exclaimed Nell, looking about helplessly, as if seeking something to refresh her memory.

"Yes, Betty was with us, when she came down from the studio," the girl continued, "and you came out from the study hall when she was showing us the cat's picture . . . and she said herself she was up there. . . ."

Nell's head began to swim around, and she felt as if the floor was rising and falling beneath her feet. Saturday evening . . . and how persistent Chérie had been . . . going alone up to the studio . . . refusing even to wait for Betty . . . and now her very errand seemed of so little consequence . . . another day would not have mattered. . . .

"And supposing she did," she heard Betty saying,

"what has that to do with Lorna Cameron's old bedaubed canvas?"

"Everything," and the young gossip nodded her head, sagely, "they say that is when the red paint was applied, and that Chérie Lawson applied it without stint . . . that the picture is entirely ruined."

"Oh, they do, do they?" cried Betty, angrily, "well, tell Lorna Cameron's friends, from me, that they are saying more than their prayers, and that it is a long lane that has no turning," and then leaving the girl abruptly, she touched Nell's arm to attract her attention. "I wonder where Chérie is," she whispered, "have you seen her, Nell?"

"No," returned Nell, in a low tone, "not since nine o'clock, but I did hear someone say that Lorna Cameron had gone to the infirmary, with a temperature. I suppose the shock has upset her, and I'd really feel sorry for her, if Chérie was not mixed up in the affair . . . but as it is, Betty, you and I are arrayed on the defensive with Chérie, to the end of the road, my dear!"

"To the end of the road," murmured Betty, "Chérie belongs to us. We must fight for her every inch of the way."

And a little later, they found her in the study hall, seated at her desk, seemingly intent on the book before her.

Surprised, she looked up at them, a tender little smile curving her lips, but her cheeks were colorless, and her eyes were sad.

"Why didn't you tell us, Chérie?" asked Nell, a strange something gripping about her heart. "Why did you let us hear it from the others?"

"*Hélas, ma cousine,*" she answered brokenly, "I did not feel at liberty. . . . Madame requested us to be silent. . . ."

A bell rang, and the pupils began coming into the

room. It was noon, and the march down to the refectory was next in order.

"Brace up, Chérie," whispered Betty, "don't let them think you care a rap . . . act as if you had nothing to worry about. . . ."

But Chérie's attempt at nonchalance was a dismal failure. The averted eyes of the passing girls left no doubt in her mind. They all believed she had done this terrible thing!

"*C'est bien,*" she murmured, gazing lovingly first at Nell and then at Betty, "that I have you, *mes amis* . . . that you have still faith in me and love me!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Land of Dreams

A soft little breeze rustled through the trees above, ever changing the patterns sketched, on the grass beneath, by the sun shining through their tender leaves.

It was the recreation hour. *Goûter* had been disposed of, and now the girls were strolling about the park, busily engaged in discussing the events of the day.

But Chérie with Nell and Betty, walked further afield than the others, wishing to be by themselves to discuss the subject uppermost in their minds, and knowing well that the same subject was the sole topic of conversation where any of the girls happened to be grouped together in all parts of the grounds.

Nell glanced about, an angry light in her eyes. Lorna Cameron with a languid air, was receiving the sympathy of her friends, standing, surrounded by them, on the other side of the driveway, and fragmentary bits of their consoling remarks could be heard at intervals.

"I believe she's enjoying it," and Nell turned away in disgust, "she would, you know . . . she's that type . . . the center of the stage she always wants, no matter how she gets there. . . ."

Betty started, and a shrewdness crept into her purple-blue eyes. "Why did she accuse you, Chérie?" she asked, suddenly, "there were others that could have done it. . . ."

"*Eh bien,*" answered Chérie, "she said I was afraid

that her picture would win the prize . . . that it was the only thing stood between me and the prize."

"You should not have praised her work as you did," chided Nell, "I always resented that . . . and now she's making capital out of it."

"*Bien sûr*, Nell, but put yourself in her place . . . think how she must feel . . . think how terrible it must be to have the thing she has cherished and worked on for months destroyed by the stroke of a vandal's brush. *Eh bien*, she has cause to grieve, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Oh, I suppose so," grudgingly from Nell, "but that's no reason she should accuse you. . . ."

"And did you really think her work so good, Chérie?" persisted Betty, frowning a little as she battled to oust a wild thought from her mind, a thought that had repeatedly asserted itself, backed by a little incident that had happened the night before in the dormitory.

"At first, yes," answered Chérie, "but later many faults appeared. Madame Travers saw them also . . . and told her of them . . . and she was so cross about it, and stared so at me. I felt so sorry for her I was afraid she would be sadly disappointed. . . ."

"But don't you think she was jealous of you, Chérie?" interrupted Betty, a trifle petulantly. Chérie was so gentle! No wonder the overbearing Lorna tried to ride roughshod over her! "Don't you think she knew that you would win the prize?"

"I think not, Betty . . . she seemed so sure of success . . . she did not even pay the least attention to any of Madame's suggestions."

"Just the same, I think she was afraid," cried Betty, "and between you and me and the gate post, I believe she did the trick, herself."

Chérie gasped in horror, and Nell was startled.

"*Non, non,* no one could do that, Betty," declared Chérie, "think . . . her very own work . . . *c'est impossible*!"

"Yes, that's a pretty big stretch of the imagination, Betty," Nell teased, "you must go slower than that. . . ."

The pink in Betty's cheeks deepened to rose. She was decidedly offended. They had no right to receive her carefully thought-out conclusion so cavalierly. She would say no more. She would bother herself no more in the matter! But the sadness in Chérie's eyes softened her . . . and after all, it was for Chérie. . . .

"Well, you may both think as you please," she told them, somewhat ungraciously, "and I intend to do the same. And last night, a strange thing happened in the dormitory . . . that is, strange in this way . . . it might throw some light on the affair. . . ."

"Has it anything to do with Lorna Cameron?" interrupted Nell, and Betty noted with a certain satisfaction, the returning interest in her tones. Chérie, too, was evincing eagerness, her pleading eyes turned on Betty.

"Yes," continued Betty, "of course! She stumbled against the foot of my bed and wakened me up . . . after I had slept hours, it seemed to me . . . and I peeped through the curtains and saw her . . . she was holding aside her curtain with one hand, and in the other she held a sheet of white paper, but the light was so dim I couldn't see what was on it . . . it might have been a sketch. . . ."

"And was that all?" asked Nell, "didn't you speak to her?"

"No," admitted Betty. Somehow the incident was dwindling to almost nothing in the telling. "She did not turn . . . I did not even see her face . . . but I am positive it was Lorna," she finished, lamely.

"Well, if that is all," said Nell rather judicially, "I fail to see where it helps any. . . ."

"She could have been coming back from the studio, couldn't she?" Betty flung at her, incensed by her superior air.

Nell gazed at her in skeptical surprise, and exclaimed, "To the studio! Away over to the west wing, through all those corridors, and up those stairs in the dark! Why she could not open the door without Madame Ouellette hearing her. . . ."

"Oh, as far as that is concerned there was nothing to it," returned Betty, with grim satisfaction. Evidently, there were some things Nell did not know! "Madame Ouellette was not in the dormitory last night, she was ill."

"*Mais oui,*" interposed Chérie, "Madame Michel had charge of us . . . and again to-night, they say. . . ."

"And the girls say," continued Betty, "that Madame Michel has only one good ear, and when that happens to be covered . . . the house could be carried away. . . ."

"*Bonjour, mes amis,*" and they found themselves looking into the bright blue eyes of old Ma'm'selle, on the other side of an immense bush of crimson peonies. They had come on her quite suddenly, without warning, and were somewhat startled, realizing on the instant that the bush had hidden her from their view, crouching as she had been, pulling up the weeds from about its roots.

"*Bonjour Ma'm'selle,*" they returned, curtsying, and they curtsied again when she presented each of them with a long-stemmed crimson flower from the blossom-weighted bush between them.

And from a little distance, Roderick, the old Scotch gardener, glared his disapproval. How could he keep

the place nice with Ma'm'selle around? There she was again, tearing the bush apart without as much as 'by your leave,' and all respects to her, she was the bane of his life. So, turning away, he grasped the handles of a wheelbarrow, filled with the twigs pruned from the vines covering a nearby arbor, and grumbling and muttering, trundled it out of sight.

And the minutes lengthened into hours, and slowly the lovely afternoon faded into the darkness of night. It was now past nine. The dormitory was in gloom, lighted only by the feeble glow from the dimmed night-light, and the gleam from the pale moon filtering through the small-paned windows.

Only the sound of regular breathing, coming from the curtained-off spaces, disturbed the stillness of the large room, and made Betty Desmond realize how very sleepy she was.

For Betty was awake, huddled down at the foot of her small white bed, peering through the slightly-parted curtains, prepared for a much-desired emergency in bathrobe and slippers.

Nell's criticism on her powers of deduction had not convinced her that she was wrong. On the contrary, it had nettled her into further action along the same lines. She would watch Lorna Cameron's every move. Night and day she would keep her under surveillance. She would prove to Nell that her suspicions were not mere nonsense. Why had Lorna Cameron been prowling about the very night the picture had been ruined? To say it was a queer coincidence, would not dispose of it, in Betty's mind. And there was a possibility that the girl might go to the studio, again. . . . She remembered hearing somebody say, that a criminal always returned to the scene of his or her evil-doing . . . and if Lorna had destroyed her own picture, wasn't she a criminal?

Betty yawned. How tired she was! How sleepy! Her aching lids drooped. But she must not allow them to close! That way lay oblivion!

Hours passed—one, two—and still Betty watched the curtains across the aisle, and in the uncertain light, once or twice, she had thought some unseen hand was drawing them aside, only to be disappointed. Clouds were passing, shutting off the moon's light at short intervals, making the shadows deepen under the dull glow of the night-light. And shadows performed strange and fantastic vagaries, at times.

She started. She was not mistaken this time . . . the curtains were moving as if caught by a passing breeze!

She leaned forward, blinking her eyes rapidly to clear them. How foggy it was in the aisle! Petulantly, she rubbed her lids. There, it was clearer now! She hoped it would stay so!

And then she gasped! From between the curtains, the object of her espionage was emerging, and slowly and sedately, she walked along the aisle! Lorna Cameron, pale and wraith-like in the moonlight, her flowing robe trailing behind her.

Betty, tingling with excitement, slipped from the bed, and followed, on the instant. What would Nell say when she heard about this? And so on through the door, which Lorna seemed to have no trouble in opening, and out into the corridor, they went, quite noiselessly.

But, once in the corridor, Lorna threw caution to the winds, darting up one stairway, down another, only to race like mad up a third. And Betty, keeping pace with her, found herself panting for breath. Where was she going? Was this the way to the studio? And where did all those stairways come from? Everything about was unfamiliar! Where was she?

A great fear seized her! Suppose she lost Lorna, and could not find her way back to the dormitory! In her anxiety, she stumbled a little, her glance wavering a moment from the flying form in front of her. But in that moment Lorna had disappeared!

She called, and tried to run after her, but no sound came from her parched lips, and her feet refused to move.

And there she stood alone, in a strange dark hall, and unable to take a step forward or backward! What was she to do? What could she do? Nothing! And with an agonizing scream she sank to the floor. And then, "Betty, Betty," came to her. Chérie and Nell were both calling her. They had found her! She was safe!

She opened her eyes. Chérie and Nell were kneeling beside her, helping her to rise. But where was she? There was her own bed, and she had been lying beside it, on the floor. What did it mean?

"How did I get here?" she murmured, "and where did she go?"

"Wake up, Betty," said Nell, shaking her a little, "you have been asleep . . . and you're still dreaming. . . ."

"Dreaming," she repeated, glancing past Chérie and Nell to the curious girls crowding in. What did Nell mean? Had she only been dreaming? Had she fallen asleep, after all? "What time is it," she asked, passing her hand, in a bewildered manner, across her forehead.

"Oh, the bell rang, long ago . . . you'll have to do some rushing to get down in time. The next time you have a bad dream, don't wait until the morning . . . have it the night before," teased Nell, to cover up Betty's still dazed condition.

And the girls laughed. Time was flying. So they

could not afford to waste any more time. And Betty was left alone with her two friends.

"But I cannot understand it," she confided to them, "I never had such a dream . . . it was so real . . . I never was so surprised when I found myself here . . ."

"But here you were, all the time," Nell told her, "and what a crash there was, when you landed on the floor."

"Did I scream?" asked Betty, remembering her fear.

"No, it was more like a groan . . . and then the fall."

Chérie nodded her head, slowly. "*Mais oui*, that is what I heard . . . and I was so afraid to look in . . . I thought you were dying. . . ."

Betty shivered. "I thought I was, myself . . . until I awoke. . . ."

"Oh, well," laughed Nell, "hurry up! Madame Duprez would not accept a nightmare for an excuse. . . ."

And as they filed out into the aisle, Chérie and Nell were still adding final touches to Betty's collar and blue silk bow.

"*Voilà*," exclaimed Chérie, with satisfaction, as the bell clanged its summons from below, "was not that quick work?"

Betty smiled her thanks. The girls were marching out into the corridor, and there was a little block at the door. Betty glanced up, and found herself looking into the eyes of Lorna Cameron. The dream flashed back to her, and she tightened her hold on Chérie's arm.

"*Eh bien*," whispered Chérie, "do you see a ghost, Betty?"

"No," returned Betty, "I was looking at Lorna

Cameron . . . you know my dream was about her. . . ."

"*Bien sûr*," soothed Chérie, "she is on your mind, petite. . . ."

"Rather," added Nell, a look of resentment creeping into her blue eyes, "the wonder is we didn't all have bad dreams."

CHAPTER XVII

More Mystery

A few hours later, Nell and Betty met in the recreation room, and looked about eagerly for Chérie. That was strange! She had promised to come immediately after class.

"Do you suppose she went up to the studio this morning?" queried Betty, her eyes on the door.

"I don't know," returned Nell, "I haven't seen her since study hour . . . but she'll be here, soon. . . ."

And again the door opened. Betty turned away impatiently. It was Lorna Cameron, who entered this time. Would Chérie ever come?

"Have you recovered from the effects of your dream?" drawled a voice in her ear, and Lorna's rather contemptuous smile greeted her startled glance.

And then she stared, not at the thin-lipped mouth of the girl, but at a dark blue mark, just below her ear, about an inch and a half in length. "What happened?" she asked, abruptly, "did you cut yourself?"

Now, it was Lorna's turn to look startled. "What are you talking about?" she snapped, "I did not cut myself. . . ." But she passed her hand over the spot, directed by Betty's eyes, and felt the raised surface beneath her fingers, "I'm sure I don't know what it can be," she continued, taking a small compact from her pocket, and endeavoring to locate the mark. "Why, it looks like paint," as a few specks crumbled off at her touch.

"It is paint," declared Betty, "blue paint . . . you'd better go to the kitchen and let one of the sisters

take it off. . . ." And without another word Lorna acted on the suggestion, and made her way in the direction of the kitchen.

"What were you saying to Lorna Cameron?" asked Nell, who had held aloof during the conversation between the two girls.

"Well," said Betty, "not anything of much account . . . she intended to make me feel foolish about that dream . . . all set to have fun at my expense, but she was too fussed up to think of it, when I saw the paint on her neck. . . ."

"Oh, there's Chérie, now," interrupted Nell, as Chérie and a few other girls entered the room together, and Betty darted toward the advancing group.

But Nell stood still, growing amazement in her eyes. What had happened? Chérie was ghastly! And her excited companions almost as pale! What was it? What were they saying? But it was difficult to connect the broken, disjointed sentences coming from their trembling lips. The words, "picture" and "destroyed" seemed to fill the air . . . surely, they were not still discussing Lorna Cameron's ruined canvas. . . .

"And now . . . *Chérie*!" called Betty, as she steered Chérie towards her cousin; the girls, who had accompanied her, holding back to allow her to pass, sending awed, commiserating glances after them.

"What about Chérie?" petulantly from Nell, nervously resenting the inexplicable situation, "Chérie looks all right! You are all right, are you not, Chérie?"

"*Hélas,* Nell, my canvas," gasped Chérie, clasping and unclasping her hands, in agitation, "my poor little 'Daisy Chain' . . ."

Nell felt a peculiar creeping sensation making its way up her spinal column, "What are you saying,

Chérie . . . what about your canvas? What has happened to it?"

"It is destroyed, Nell . . . as the other was . . . with paint. . . ."

"Paint," repeated Nell, horrified. Chérie's picture to meet the same fate as Lorna's! Who had done this thing? Surely they could not blame Chérie for this! And then, quite suddenly, a fierce anger seemed to burn within her, and she cried, indignantly, "Where is Lorna Cameron? What has she to say, now?"

"Yes," from Betty, "wait till she finds out Chérie's picture is spoiled with red paint, too. . . ."

"But it was not red paint that was used this time," said Chérie, "it was blue. . . ."

"Blue? Did you say blue?" and Betty's brows drew together in a frown, and there was a strange expression forming in the purplish depths of the black-lashed eyes.

"*Mais, oui,*" answered Chérie, "blue. . . ."

"That's funny," said Betty, and turning away, hastily, she crossed the room toward the door.

"Where to now, Betty?" called Nell after her, surprised at her very abrupt departure.

"I am going to Mother Vernet," she answered without turning around, "I have something to tell her. . . ."

And to Mother Vernet she went, and the mother superior listened patiently to all she had to say . . . and the interview was quite prolonged . . . "also satisfactory," she informed Chérie and Nell, later, but what it had all been about, she kept to herself.

To go back a little and try to describe Chérie's feelings, when in the presence of Madame Travers and a few of the girls, she had lifted the covering from her easel and discovered that the vandal had again been at work, would be almost impossible. Her picture was spoiled! All chance of winning the prize

was gone! And helplessly and hopelessly, she stood, as if transfixed, before it, until the ejaculations of horrified surprise and pity of those about her forced upon her the remembrance that she was not alone.

"Oh, Madame," she sobbed, turning away from her paint-bedaubed canvas, "*c'est terrible* . . . I am *désolée*. . . ."

"My dear child," said Madame Travers, in a shocked tone, "what a pity! I am so sorry that your picture is also ruined . . . and the blue paint, this time, was used . . . showing that the vandal took whatever was at hand to destroy it. . . ." And gently she placed her arm about Chérie. She wished she could have saved her this sorrow and disappointment. In justice, she knew that she should have extended to Lorna Cameron the same amount of sympathy that she felt for this girl. But before the surprise and consternation occasioned by the discovery of Lorna's defaced canvas could give place to sympathy, the enraged girl had hurled her accusation at Chérie, causing resentment to spring up in Madame Travers. But she had refrained from siding with Katherine Wolfson's protégée, dreading that her interference would be considered favoritism and so do more harm than good where Chérie was concerned, realizing fully that Lorna was the type of girl who would take advantage of such a construction to strengthen her reason for engendering, within herself, such an unwarranted dislike toward a fellow-student.

But this second outrage had placed things in a different light. Lorna Cameron could hardly persist in the face of this similar happening. She could hardly say that Chérie had destroyed both pictures. Yet, it was quite evident that the same person had been the transgressor in each case. The way the paint was applied, the direction of the strokes, the replacing of the covering over the easel, all proved this. Therefore,

if Chérie had ruined one, she had ruined the other. Which, of course, was sheer nonsense. No person would destroy the product of brain and hands in a fashion so ruthless, especially, in this case, when without a doubt the prize was as good as won.

But Lorna Cameron did persist! She branded the destruction of Chérie's picture as a clever trick, resorted to by Chérie herself to throw them off the scent.

She had known nothing of it, until she came back from the kitchen, where she had gone to have the blue mark removed from her throat. What was the excitement? What had happened now? And then she noticed the group about Chérie, and a steely glitter came into her pale blue eyes. The girls seemed friendly toward her . . . sympathetic . . . what had turned the tide of their goodwill in her favor?

"What is it all about?" she asked a girl standing beside her.

"Oh, haven't you heard?" replied the girl in surprise, and then she told her.

"She did it herself," burst from Lorna, "she was afraid . . . she would rather destroy her own work than be found out. . . ."

"That will do, Mademoiselle Cameron," interrupted Madame Duprez, peremptorily, "this is neither the time nor the place for such a wild accusation . . . go, at once, to Mother Vernet."

And Mademoiselle Cameron obeyed.

But the harm was done. The girls drew back and looked askance at Chérie. Nell was furious, but her cousin's light touch on her arm reminded her of the futility of speaking her mind, as she termed it. The situation was becoming intolerable. There must be something done at once. Lorna Cameron was having it all her own way. It was time Chérie's friends interfered and put a stop to such a one-sided affair.

Chérie, now, had as much right to accuse Lorna, as Lorna had to accuse Chérie! As a matter of fact, Chérie had had no fear of failure, while the jealousy displayed by Lorna indicated anything but confidence on her part in the superiority of her work over her rival's.

What was it Betty had said about Lorna prowling about the dormitory? And what had Betty dreamed last night? Dreamed! Maybe Betty had only dreamed the other! Nell sighed. What a mystery it was, to be sure! How she wished she could fathom it!

"Chérie," she whispered, "let us look for Betty. . . . I want to know why she went to Mother Vernet. . . ." She paused. The far-away expression in Chérie's eyes, saddened her. Of what was she thinking? Of whom? Certainly, of no one present. "You didn't hear a word I said, Chérie," she continued, "where are your thoughts?"

"I was asking *le bon Dieu* to help me, *ma cousine* . . . and I feel already so much better about all this. . . ."

. . . . . .

"Nell, Nell, are you awake?" whispered Betty, prodding her friend, unmercifully, with her strong little fingers.

"If not, I'm dead," grumbled Nell, "and at that I think you'd even wake the dead you use such wonderful persuasion . . . you have me almost dragged out of bed . . . what do you want, anyway?"

"Oh, hush Nell, I want you to get up, at once . . . Mother Vernet told me to waken you if Lorna Cameron did any more prowling about . . . and she has just gone out into the hall, so hurry . . . here's your robe and slippers . . . hurry, hurry."

On the instant, Nell was in action. "Mother Vernet, does she know?"

"Yes, I told her everything . . . about the blue

paint on Lorna's neck and about her prowling . . . and Mother Vernet and Madame Travers are both on watch, now, in the studio. . . ."

"Why didn't you say something about it before?"

"I wanted to be sure that Lorna would take her nightly promenade . . . I didn't want to be laughed at. . . ."

"No! Well, wake Chérie up . . . she should see this thing out. . . ."

"I am awake," came through the curtains, "what is it?"

"Lorna has just left the dormitory . . . get hold of your robe and slippers . . . you can put them on as we go along . . . we must follow and see where she goes."

"But how can we pass Madame Michell?"

"The same way Lorna did, walk past . . . she must be reclining on her good ear to-night."

So the three, Indian fashion, followed one another, down the aisle, past the curtained-off couch of the mistress-of-the-night, and out into the hall, sending up three sighs of relief as the door clicked shut after them.

But Lorna was nowhere in sight! She had evidently not lingered on her way. She was probably on the other side of the jut-out, where the West wing joined the main building, and beyond which the stairs led to the studio.

And so, noiselessly the girls stole along, their senses on the alert, ready to dodge out of sight at a moment's notice, to escape detection.

"The fat will be in the fire," murmured Betty, "if she ever turns and sees us."

But she never turned! And quite slowly and sedately she moved along the corridor, her robe of silk and lace trailing on the floor behind her as she

walked. And at the studio door she stopped, fumbling about the jamb, and they caught the gleam of the key in her hand as she fitted it into the lock.

And, breathlessly, the girls watched from a safe distance the tall figure disappear into the darkness of the studio, watched Mother Vernet and Madame Travers cross the corridor, in the shadowy, uncertain light of the moon riding high through fleecy clouds, veiling, at times, its splendor in their lace-like folds, and gasped audibly when Mother pressed the button, flooding within and without with a dazzling light. And then Madame Travers beckoned to them, and they followed her into the room.

In amazement, they stood motionless! Apparently, utterly unconscious of her audience, Lorna Cameron deliberately dipped a brush in some paint . . . raised the covering from Chérie's easel . . . and without further hesitation, passed it back and forth, across the already ruined canvas, with strong even strokes. . . .

Replacing the brush, she turned toward them, facing them.

Startled they gazed upon her, awe slowly taking the place of resentment. What was the matter with her? Why did she look like that?

And unwaveringly, she was following a straight course to the open door; unseeingly, with staring eyes, opened wide, glistening strangely from out the pale, set-featured face, hearing nothing, conscious of nothing . . . Lorna Cameron was fast asleep!

As fast asleep, as if she were in her little white bed in the dormitory below! Lorna Cameron was a somnambulist . . . a sleep-walker!

Betty, near the door and dreading possible danger to the sleeping girl, closed it hastily, and the next moment Lorna crashed against its oaken panels.

With a loud cry she awakened, and staggering back

she looked wildly around. Where was she? Who were all those people?

And then the meaning of it all seemed to dawn upon her, and she shuddered, "Oh, what have I done?" she moaned, sinking to the floor, and covering her face with her hands, "what have I done?"

CHAPTER XVIII

A Bolt from the Blue

The next morning Lorna was quite ill and Dr. Donovan was called. Mother Vernet tapped restlessly on the open page of the book she had been reading, with her thin white fingers. She was facing a problem. There had been an upset, and certain readjustments were in line.

"Come in," she invited, hearing a light knock upon her door.

"That girl is on the verge of a nervous breakdown," said Dr. Donovan, entering, "so I advise you to get in touch with her parents, at once . . . she must have a complete change. . . ."

Mother Vernet started. That was the best thing could happen! It would relieve the situation! With Lorna Cameron away, the unfortunate occurrence would soon be forgotten by the pupils. She, herself, poor girl was not to blame! Last night, after the effects of the shock had worn away, she became communicative, acknowledging that she had been subject to like attacks when younger, if worried or troubled, in any way, about school work of any kind, but as she grew older they became less frequent, and finally ceased. . . .

It was an affliction! She had evidently realized that Chérie's picture might win the prize, and subconsciously the dread became an obsession . . . and the return of her old ailment was the result.

"Poor Chérie," sighed Mother Vernet, "what an

experience for the dear child . . . for she has been the real sufferer. . . ."

And Chérie at the same moment was thinking the same thing. What an experience! To be accused of such a terrible thing! Not to be believed! *Eh bien,* that was pitiful! To be shunned by all, as one unfit to associate with . . . even *les petites,* the babies, had stared their disapproval in round-eyed horror at such a wicked girl! *Hélas,* what she had suffered! What misery it had been! Only for dear Nell and Betty . . . but *le bon Dieu* be praised she was exonerated, at last! Mother Vernet had come into the refectory at breakfast, and told the pupils the real facts of the case. And the surprise and chagrin of some of the most militant of Lorna's adherents had appealed to Nell's sense of humor.

"Such is fame," she could not refrain from whispering to Chérie, "a gas balloon . . . and a tiny prick of a pin's point destroys it."

Afterwards, when Madame Travers told Chérie that Lorna Cameron was going to Europe for her health with her parents, and she relayed the information to her cousin, Nell registered indignation in a very marked degree.

"Oh, and what about you?" she demanded, "is there nothing coming to you? She did not suffer as you did . . . what about you?"

"*C'est fini,* Nell . . . think no more of it. I have nothing to say . . . they know now I did not do it . . . while poor Lorna . . ."

"Poor Lorna, indeed . . . I like that! Who but Lorna could get away like this from all the trouble she raised? You could not . . . and neither could I . . . why pity her?"

"*Eh bien,* Nell, she could not help that . . . she was not accountable for her actions . . . she did not know what she was doing!"

"No?" with a suspicion of a sneer in her tones, "but she accused you . . . she had no mercy for you . . . and how has she explained the finding of the sketch that you lost? Did she take that while she was asleep, too? And did she hide it in her drawer . . ."

"Hush, Nell," pleaded Chérie, touching her cousin's lips lightly with her fingers, "they did not say . . . but it is possible, *n'est-ce pas?* Did not Betty say she was carrying a paper that first time she saw her walking in the night?"

Nell laughed. "As far as you are concerned the incident is closed . . . is that it, Chérie?"

"*Mais oui,* Nell," she answered, smiling, "and it is better so. . . ."

. . . . .

It was a week later and Ma'm'selle's feast day, and preparations had been made to celebrate it with great éclat. His Lordship, the bishop, was coming. He always did. He never forgot Ma'm'selle's day, showing the respect he felt for the old religieuse, by his presence. Old Ma'm'selle, the last of a royal line, that was now only a memory to the peoples of the earth, a memory kept alive by a few troubled pages of European history.

And Ma'm'selle was all excitement! Not for herself, but for her babies, *les petites*! This afternoon, they were to be featured on the program, as usual. And she had doubts and fears concerning the manner in which they would acquit themselves in their well-rehearsed songs and recitations. While she loved them, she was not blind to their faults. She knew them! She knew Marie Janette would doze, and fall from her chair to the floor. So Marie Janette must be watched. And Elise would contrive to trip over her own feet in a way almost incomprehensible. She al-

ways did! *Hélas,* they were only children! What would you have?

And after all, it was little Zoe who distinguished herself. Zoe, fairy-like and blonde. "And can you tell me, my dear child, who made you?" asked the bishop in his kind voice.

"Yes, my God," answered Zoe, hopelessly mixed, "the Lord made me."

And Ma'm'selle stared sorrowfully at the small delinquent, as His Lordship turned hastily away. How she had drummed that into their ears! How she had explained that "my lord" was the bishop's title . . . and this *enfant terrible* had . . . *eh, la, la.* . . .

But Ma'm'selle's feast day was memorable in more ways than one, especially to Chérie and Nell.

After the entertainment was over, and His Lordship had gone, the afternoon mail was distributed in the recreation room, where all were enjoying the rather elaborate *goûter* provided for this occasion, and the cousins each received a letter.

"And Betty also draws," observed Nell, laughing, "now there can be no jealousy, whatsoever. . . ."

Chérie glanced at the missive she held, and at once recognized the writing. It was from Katherine Wolfson!

So, with a murmured apology to Nell and Betty, she opened the envelope, going a little distance from her companions, wishing to get away from the chattering group surrounding them. And as she walked, she read the following:

"My dear little friend,

"It is too bad that you have been subjected to such an ordeal. Madame Travers has sent me all the story of the distressing occurrence, so I am in possession of full particulars. And to think that no one could be

blamed! The girl herself was innocent of any intent to harm either her picture or yours! Somnambulists know nothing of their actions while in that state, yet their accuracy in judging distances, in reaching their objectives, is startling to the on-looker. Take for instance this case . . . that girl, if awake, would never have dared to go alone to that studio in the dark. She would have been afraid of her own shadow . . . and scampered back again to the dormitory in her terror.

"Madame also writes that the prize will have to be awarded to one of the other students, whose work shows conscientious endeavor, but leaves much to be desired from an artistic standpoint. . . .

"Well, it's an ill wind blows nobody good, and that particular young lady has profited mightily by your loss. But do not grudge her this little honor, my child . . . the years will bring you much to make up for this shabby trick of fate.

"Now, to other things more pleasant! I have taken a bungalow for the summer, high up in the mountains, and I think the air will be as beneficial to you as it always is to me.

"There is something else that will make a great difference in your life and mine . . . but I must say no more . . . and I had better bring this to a close before I commit myself. . . ."

And there it ended, with only the initials, K and W, for a signature. Chérie read and reread the written words, so strangely ending Katherine Wolfson's letter. Why did she couple their two lives together? And what was it that could make a difference to them both? And why, oh, why had she said so much, and so little? *Eh bien,* a whetted curiosity was a very troublesome thing!

She turned to look for Nell and Betty, and at a

little distance spied Betty . . . but Nell was nowhere in sight. She would like to show her cousin the letter. Nell's opinion was always worth something!

"Have you seen Nell?" she asked, touching Betty's arm to attract her attention, "she is not in the room. . . ."

Betty glanced around. "Isn't she? She was a second ago. . . . I was telling her about this letter from Gerald . . . the darlingest letter, Chérie, you ever read . . . and he sends his best regards to my two friends . . . and hopes . . ."

But Chérie was not attending, her eyes were on Madame Duprez. *Bien sûr,* Madame Duprez was beckoning to her, and with some misgivings she crossed the room. Had anything happened to Nell?

"Mademoiselle Brooks has gone up to the dormitory," said madame, quietly, "and she wants you to follow."

"*Mais oui,* madame," anxiously from Chérie, "is she ill?"

"No, not ill . . . but disturbed . . . some news from home, she said . . . and asked me to let you know. . . ."

Chérie's heart beats quickened. News from home! What news from home could disturb her? Her father . . . surely nothing had happened to Robert Brooks! That would be too cruel!

Up in the dormitory she found Nell, huddled up on the little white bed, her face buried in her pillow, her body quivering with half-suppressed sobs.

"Nell, Nell," she cried, now thoroughly alarmed, "what is wrong? What has happened?"

"It's Daddy," moaned Nell, "he is . . . he is . . ."

"Not ill," interposed Chérie, "*hélas,* do not say Uncle Robert is ill, Nell!"

"Oh, no, he's not ill," came the answer, "I wish that was all . . . it is something much worse. . . ."

Chérie gasped. Worse? Could it be possible that Robert Brooks was dead? But no, the letter was from him.

"What do you mean, Nell?" she asked, bending over her cousin, and placing her hand on her convulsively heaving shoulder, "tell Chérie what has happened. . . ."

"Oh, I—I—cannot. . . ." she wailed.

"*Eh bien,* he is not dead . . . the dear Uncle Robert. . . ."

"Oh, no," was the retort as Nell raised her head, and glanced with tear-wet, angry eyes at Chérie, "he is not dead . . . he is married!"

"He is married, you say?" murmured Chérie, her puzzled gaze resting on her cousin's flushed face; "what do you mean, Nell?"

"I mean just what I say," returned Nell, another sob breaking from her lips, "he was married a week ago!"

"Married," repeated Chérie, and the word seemed meaningless.

"Yes, married . . . and to that horrible Mrs. Wolfson of yours," blazed Nell, burying her small fist vindictively into the soft feather pillow, moist from her tears, glaring at her cousin as if she had been the cause of all this trouble descending upon her.

Chérie sank limply down on Nell's only chair, a dazed expression in her widely-opened eyes. What was Nell saying? She must have made some mistake!

"Oh, for goodness sake, stop staring at me like that," cried Nell, sharply, "don't you understand what I said?"

Chérie nodded. "I know what you said . . . but I do not quite understand," she murmured, "it is something I never thought of. . . ."

"No, of course not," stormed Nell, "you wouldn't . . . who did? I never thought of it either . . . it came like a bolt from the blue, Chérie . . . and I'll never forgive him!" And again she buried her face in the pillow, sobbing pitifully.

Chérie gazed sadly at the dejected figure in silence, her sensitive lips closed, endeavoring to control their quivering. But presently in the depths of her large dark eyes appeared something more than sorrow. An eager, hopeful light brightened them, and the sweet lips relaxed a trifle into the semblance of a smile.

A feeling of joy had slowly taken possession of her. Robert Brooks was married to Katherine Wolfson! And Robert Brooks and Katherine Wolfson were her friends! This then was the "something else" that would make such a difference in her life as well as in the life of her benefactress, Mrs. Wolfson! The "something else" that had caused her to close her letter so abruptly! And what a difference it would make! *Bien sûr,* it was so wonderful . . . and she was so happy. . . .

Heretofore, thoughts of the coming vacation had only saddened her, and had been dismissed almost before they were formed. *Eh bien,* she would probably go to the Browns! Nell would go to her father, or to her aunts. But Nell had the right . . . while she . . . *Hélas,* she belonged nowhere! And now this wonderful thing had happened! And already she was being considered . . . already plans had been made for the summer, which included her . . . and in the bungalow in the mountains, they would all be together. . . .

And with a start her thoughts came back to the apparently heart-broken girl on the small white bed, with the crumpled letter clutched in one hand. Poor Nell! To her the situation did not appear so blissful! Somebody had stepped into her dear, dead

mother's place! And that "somebody" was a comparative stranger, with whom she would have to share the affection of her father! Dear Nell, how she would resent it all!

Chérie sighed, and bent lower over her cousin. "*Ma pauvrette,*" she whispered, "you must cry no more . . . your eyes will be red, and the girls . . ."

"I don't care," Nell broke in, miserably, "the girls may have the supper to themselves . . . I'm not going down!"

CHAPTER XIX

The Month of Roses

Chérie looked about with despair in her heart. What was to be done in a case like this? Nell should not fret so, she would make herself ill. Uncle Robert was married to Katherine Wolfson, and all the tears in the world could not change that fact. She must accept the inevitable! There was nothing else to do! If she would only listen to reason, and try to make the best of it.

"Nell," she pleaded turning her gaze again upon her cousin, "do not cry . . . it is not like you . . . you have always been so brave, so fine! Nell, dear, do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you," came in stifled tones, "but I am not going down to supper . . . I am not hungry. . . ."

"*Hélas,* and would you disappoint Ma'm'selle? You know she will be our hostess this evening, and the souvenirs she has made for us are even now placed at each plate. . . . I saw them and they are all so tiny, and the colors are so beautiful . . . two colors in each little paper cross . . . and they are all the work of her own thin little hands . . . *eh bien,* what patience. . . ."

"Patience," cried Nell, jerking herself up to glare at Chérie, "foolishness, you mean . . . cutting colored paper up in tiny scraps . . . only to lace them together again . . . what else could you call it?"

"Call it what you will, *ma cousine,*" answered Chérie, glancing at her watch, "only hurry . . . or

even the poor little crosses shall be all gone." And Chérie could not suppress the faint smile that parted her lips. She had gained her point. Nell's grief had been swallowed up in petulance, for the moment, and her tears no longer flowed.

"How can I go down with red lids?" she said irritably, "every girl in the refectory will be a question mark . . . and I could not stand that and be silent. . . . I am afraid I would tell them that a hateful woman had become my stepmother. . . ."

"Hush, Nell, you do not mean what you say . . . Madame Wolfson is so lovely . . . you always liked her. . . ."

"I always like Madame Wolfson, yes, granted . . . but she is no longer Madame Wolfson. She is Mrs. Brooks now! She even controls his soul. . . ."

"Controls his soul?" repeated Chérie, puzzled, "what are you saying, Nell? What do you mean?"

"I mean that he has become a Catholic to satisfy her . . . embraced her Faith, is the way he put it . . . but it means the same thing, doesn't it? They were married by a Father Quigley. . . ."

"*Mais oui,* even so . . . what power could she have over his soul? Only to *le bon Dieu* are we accountable . . . only love for *le bon Dieu* controls the soul. . . ."

"I—I'm sorry," stammered Nell, "I didn't say it to hurt you, Chérie . . . I only thought she had coerced him. . . ."

"Why should you think that, Nell?" asked Chérie, sorrowfully, "you have never been compelled to even enter the chapel, here . . . you have been free as air in all spiritual things . . . *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, yes, I know, Chérie . . . and I don't really mean what I said, at all . . . why should I? I know better . . . but I am just about heartbroken over this . . ." And Nell dissolved again in tears.

This would never do. If Nell kept this up, nothing

would make her presentable enough to appear at the elaborately decorated supper table, that Chérie had glimpsed through the half-opened refectory door, on her way up. So, in desperation, she half-led and half-dragged the still-weeping girl toward the small wash-stand in the corner, and pouring the water from the blue-and-white delft pitcher into the blue-and-white delft basin with a splash, she proceeded in the same reckless manner to bathe her cousin's tear-stained countenance; thus endangering Nell's chances this week of obtaining a good mark for the condition of her white curtains. But at last the gesture proved effective, in as much as a perfectly fresh appearance was acquired, and Nell descended to the refectory, a little later, with all traces of the emotional storm, through which she had just passed, absolutely effaced. *Eh bien,* it had required diplomacy, persuasion, and firmness, and Chérie panted somewhat from her strenuous efforts, but the result was worth the trouble, *n'est-ce pas?*

. . . . .

And so the days of the rose-month passed. The finals had been disposed of a week ago, and to-day, Commencement was a thing of yesterday. The pupils were all busily engaged, preparing to depart. The summer vacation was here, at last! To-morrow, they would be on their way to their various homes, eagerly anticipating the pleasures possible during the next two months.

It was now about two o'clock, and some of the girls, who had finished packing their belongings into their small trunks, were strolling in the park, under the sheltering branches of the great trees.

Sunshine was everywhere! The sky was as blue as only a June sky is supposed to be! The air was sweet and warm, filled with flower-messages; perfumed love-greetings from the hundreds of roses, dotting the

lawns, here and there, in clumps, on trellised arches, over arbors, everywhere. Crimson, yellow, pink, white! Full-blown, half-opened and tiny buds, some almost hidden in the luxuriance of their foliage.

And Ma'm'selle was pottering about, a broad smile on her lips, her cap awry and very limp. She was happy! Before her were the warm beautiful days, weeks and months, that she could be with her flower-friends. And she would watch them bud blossom and wither . . . lasting only their allotted time . . . the short span they were allowed to grace the earth with their sweetness and beauty. But is not death the portal of life? Do not all things die that they may live? *Voilà,* would not she, herself, have to die, before she could reach Life Eternal!

"Chérie! Nell!" came from Betty as she ran toward her two friends, holding aloft a letter as she ran. "I have just received this from home," she continued when she reached them, "and I must go to New York, to-morrow. . . . when are you going?"

"To-morrow, also," answered Chérie, rather hurriedly, conscious that Nell was looking straight ahead, without any intention of answering any inquiries that involved her home life in any way.

"Oh, but you and Nell are going up into the mountains . . . and I am going to the hot city . . . and to think you two will be together! Imagine that for fun!"

"But you will be with your mother," said Nell, and there was a shade of bitterness in her tones.

Betty glanced at her in surprise. What was the matter with Nell? "Oh, of course," she murmured, apologetically, "and it will be all right . . . but I wanted to spend a few days on the farm with Uncle Barney and Aunt Mary . . . they have fixed everything up, and the place looks lovely . . . and the

real truth is I thought the three of us might be there together for a day or so. . . ."

"*Mais oui,* that would have been nice," assented Chérie, "they are so pleasant, the dear uncle and aunt . . ."

"Yes, yes, but we will go some other time," promised Betty, "and it will not be so bad in the city . . . we will go to Rockaway, and Long Beach . . ."

"*Eh bien,* the Rockaway was delightful," began Chérie, and then she stopped, noticing the sadness deepening in Nell's blue eyes. *Hélas!* It was that day she went to Rockaway that dear Aunt Lottie was so ill! How thoughtless of her to speak of it in Nell's hearing!

"Well, I must finish packing," and Betty folded up her letter, and slipped it into her pocket, "for I have to take an early train . . . and Uncle John is coming for me about seven. . . ."

And the cousins were alone.

"I suppose Betty thinks I am a most discontented wretch," muttered Nell, sadly, "but I cannot pretend that I am bubbling over with joy or anything like it. . . . I am not happy, and I dread the whole business . . . meeting my father . . . my stepmother . . . everything . . ."

"Nell, Nell," exclaimed Chérie, "do not speak so! Your father will crave your approval. . . and if you withhold it, he shall be the unhappy one. . . . Try and be your dear self for his sake . . ."

And Nell listened and looked lovingly into her cousin's sweet dark eyes, vowing to herself that she would follow this good advice. After all, what was the use? And then there was always Chérie! They would be together and if things became unendurable in the house, they could steal away to some quiet nook, and forget all unpleasant happenings, in their love and trust for each other.

"*Bien sûr,* this is a beautiful spot, Nell," observed Chérie, looking about, hoping to turn Nell's thoughts away from a subject that made her so unhappy . . . *eh bien,* it was a problem she would have to solve for herself, and no amount of advice would be any help when she faced it, "and there is dear old Ma'm'selle in the midst of roses . . . how she loves them . . ."

Nell started, and glanced across to the arbor, following the direction of Chérie's motioning hand. How placid the sweet face was! What a long peaceful life she had led sheltered by these convent walls! She had never known the heartaches, the disappointments, the troubles, that darken the lives of the children of the world. Had she not chosen the better part?

"She is happy, at least," murmured Nell, sadly, gazing wistfully at the slender black-robed figure . . . the sweet fair old face with its countless tiny lines . . . the drooping shoulders, bending a little forward, giving the impression of a proud graciousness rather than the result caused by the weight of the many years through which she had passed. . . .

"Yes, she is happy," repeated Nell, "secure in her love of God . . . and He will never forget her . . . and I . . ."

She paused abruptly, pressing her lips close together. A tightening in her throat warned her that tears were again threatening. She must put all such thoughts aside, and try to make the best of the miserable situation. She turned away, her eyes reluctantly leaving the peaceful scene before her, a scene that would always linger in her memory . . . the beautiful blue of the June sky above . . . the many shades of green on grass and foliage . . . the roses . . . and Ma'm'selle . . .

. . . . .

And the next day, Betty bade her two friends a tearful farewell. "Now promise you will write to

me," she pleaded, her purple-blue eyes moist, glistening drops on the black lashes, "both of you, remember . . . I know I am going to be too lonesome for words . . ."

"*Mais oui,*" Chérie assured her, "we shall write to you Betty . . . and tell you all about the mountains . . ."

"And about all the good times you and Nell will have . . . I want to hear everything . . . about Nell's stepmother . . ."

"*Bien sûr,*" interrupted Chérie, hastily, she felt, for a moment, a little annoyed at Betty's persistence. But such persistence was only natural among friends. And Betty did not understand. She knew nothing of Nell's resentful attitude toward her father's second marriage . . . all she knew was that Robert Brooks had married Mrs. Wolfson, Chérie's great friend, and that both girls were to spend their vacation with them, at the bungalow, in the mountains. And to Betty the arrangement seemed ideal. What luck! Imagine, the two of them to be together for the whole vacation! No wonder, she felt blue! Poor little Betty!

And then, she was gone!

Chérie looked at Nell, and Nell looked at Chérie, and there was a sullen expression in Nell's eyes.

"I feel so helpless," she muttered, "I can do nothing! I would love to have Betty with us for a couple of weeks . . . but now I would not dare ask her . . . I am no longer mistress of my father's house. . . ."

Chérie made no answer. What Nell said was true. But there was another side to be considered. If Robert Brooks had not married Katherine Wolfson there would be no bungalow . . . Nell would be only boarding in some hotel with her father . . . or visiting her aunts at Oldville . . . and having Betty would be entirely out of the question in either case. But very

wisely, she kept all this logic to herself. There was nothing to be gained by trying to convince Nell, that she was in the wrong. She was quick and sensitive. "*Eh bien,* she would lose confidence in me," thought Chérie, "and that must never be."

Slowly, the hours went by, and now it was noon. A number of the girls had left by this time, and the refectory had a deserted look as the remaining pupils took their places, here and there, at the long tables. And Chérie and Nell felt lonesome as their eyes sought the vacant place between them.

"*La petite* is on her way," whispered Chérie.

Nell sighed. "Betty is such a dear," she murmured, "we'll miss her, Chérie."

"*Bien sûr* . . . she is so true, our little friend . . . there is no one more true in all the wide, wide world . . ." And so the day passed.

At six, they were to leave, and the taxi was already at the door waiting for them. They would be all night on the train, a solid-vestibule train, made up of Pullman sleeping cars. Sometime in the morning they were due at Kingston, where Robert Brooks would be waiting for them with his roadster. The bungalow was twenty miles further up in the mountains, but the roads were good, and the distance meant nothing with an automobile to cover the ground.

"Did you notice the name on this car?" asked Nell, as they boarded the train, the porter leading the way to their berths, not yet made up, "you know all those cars are named. . . ."

"*Mais non,* I did not notice, Nell . . . what was it?"

"*Chérie!*" answered Nell, "was the name. . . ."

"How strange," exclaimed Chérie.

"Yes, isn't it?" smiled Nell, "quite a coincidence!"

CHAPTER XX

At the Bungalow

It was a month later. The July sun was beating mercilessly upon the sandy road, winding down from the mountain.

Chérie and Nell paused on the bridge. Beneath was "The Hollow", and, fascinated, they gazed into the mistiness of countless shades of green. The tops of the tall trees waved almost within reach of their hands, against the stone railing upon which they leaned, and away again as the soft breeze stirred the heated atmosphere. About them ranged the mountains, forming a sky line of wondrous charm and grandeur. In the distance, a lake shimmered and sparkled through the trees, like a great jewel, and further on, a river gurgled and complained as it tumbled down its rocky bed to find the level of the sea.

"*Eh bien,* is it not beautiful, Nell," murmured Chérie, "some day I shall go down there . . ."

"Yes, certainly," agreed Nell, "but not to-day, my dear. To-day belongs to your friends . . . you must send souvenirs to the twins and to Betty, and the store must be a mile from here . . . and you know how long a farmer's mile can be . . ."

Chérie laughed, and from afar an echo answered. An awed expression crept into her dark eyes, and she looked fearfully back over her shoulder. "The place seems filled with mystery," she said, a trifle nervously, "I should not be surprised to meet a sprite . . . or a fairy . . ."

"Oh, no you wouldn't be surprised," interposed Nell, "you would be simply frightened out of your wits . . . but there are no such things, so you are safe enough . . . and I for one am glad. It is hard to deal with one's own kind, without taking anything as elusive as fairies into consideration." And with a little sigh, she turned her gaze down the sunlit road that seemed to disappear on the other side of the bridge, a sad droop to the red lips, a reminiscent light in her eyes.

Chérie threw a quick glance toward her cousin, pity flashing over her, as she slipped her arm about her, protectingly.

"Does your head ache?" she questioned, sympathy in her voice.

"No," answered Nell, shaking her head, slowly, "it is nothing, Chérie . . . let us walk on, and then I shall be all right. . . ."

Together they continued on their way across the bridge, to the road, which seemed to arise and meet them, feeling the heat of the yellow sand through their shoes as they silently walked along.

Chérie coughed a little to hide the sigh she could not keep back. Poor dear Nell, how unhappy she was? And how very unhappy they all were? She, herself, felt the strain of the past month telling on her nerves. Loyalty, love, gratitude, and justice warred continually in her mind, but the situation seemed beyond them all. Instead of improving with time, it was becoming worse.

From the first, everything went wrong! Nell felt a certain restraint in her father's greeting, or fancied she did. And all the good resolutions, she had made, were as nothing when her eyes rested on her stepmother, waiting in the car to receive her. Resentment, dislike and discontent welled up again within her

What right had this woman in her dear mother's place?

And so things had not gone well at the bungalow. For although, Nell was never offensive to her father's wife, by word or action, still Katherine Brooks felt herself repulsed by the reserve in which Nell wrapped herself, in her presence. She was no longer the fun-loving girl, and even her father gave up at last trying to please her. What was the use? In a short time, she would go back to the convent, and another year would roll around before the same problem would again face him. No, it was better to pass over things as lightly as possible, and hope for the best. And just now, the best thing in life to him, was peace.

But Katherine Brooks could not dismiss the unpleasantness of existing conditions from her mind so readily. She was nonplussed. She had always liked Nell, and she wished she could make her happy. She was sensitive herself, and understood the sorrow that possessed the girl, despite the attitude of cold indifference she assumed. Grief for her dead mother bred fierce resentment against anyone daring to usurp her place. And Katherine Brooks felt an infinite pity for this stepdaughter of hers. She realized the foolishness of it all. Had she herself not been a martyr to a memory for years? Had she not wasted the best years of her life in useless repining for her own daughter?

"God forgive me," she murmured, humbly, when she remembered this, "and I thought I was submitting to His will . . . forgetting that my constant grieving was a ceaseless rebuke . . ."

And now, Nell . . . if she could only win her love and trust! But how? That was the question. If patience and sweetness could have accomplished anything, it would have been accomplished at the offset;

but evidently, other means were necessary to win the heart of this girl, into whose life she had intruded.

"After all," she told herself, "it is an intrusion of a sort . . . and she blames me . . . and I was so sure of myself . . . I thought I was doing so much for both girls, that we would all be so happy . . ."

She sighed, audibly, and walking to the end of the porch, gazed sadly and unseeingly, beyond the tree tops, that touched the rail with their quivering leaves.

The bungalow was situated on the rather sheer side of a mountain, facing the road. The approach wound up beside it and was built of stones, probably, some thirty or more steps, counting the landings, which kept veering the steps in the direction of the entrance to the porch. Within, the rooms were furnished artistically as well as comfortably, but no lavish expenditure was in evidence anywhere, in fact, simplicity ruled throughout the house.

The girls' room, on which Katherine Brooks had expended days of thought and work, was tastefully done in blue, the cretonne hangings carrying out the color scheme to a nicety.

Chérie loved this room, and Nell did, too. She had confided that much to her cousin, but she steeled her heart against its alluring beauty, feeling a certain satisfaction in silence, as Chérie praised it, with much enthusiasm, in her pretty, foreign manner.

All this came back to Chérie now, plodding along the hot road, beside the still-silent Nell. She had felt so sorry that day for Aunt Katherine, as she called Robert Brook's wife, noting the pained expression in her kind eyes. But she had not interfered, and it was better so. If she had championed one, the other would have taken offense! And with the help of *le bon Dieu* everything would come right! At least, she could pray! And pray, she did, that Nell could see things

in a different light, and that they would all be happy, together.

A few cars, clustered together, now came in sight and she knew they had almost reached their destination, the "store".

Everything and anything could be purchased at the "store"; drygoods, hardware, groceries, meats, shoes, ice cream, confectionery, stationery, and novelties of every kind and description, all crowded together within a space hardly sufficient to hold one of the above mentioned lines, with justice to the goods; and to top it all, in the back, was an up-to-date post office, doing business every day, except Sunday.

"These little pillows, Nell, filled with pines," said Chérie, picking up one of the small embroidered squares, "are they not sweet? I shall send one to Ma'm'selle, and one to Madame Travers . . ."

"Yes, they are quite pretty," assented Nell, "and while you are making a choice, I'll see if there is any mail for us . . ."

But Chérie had caught sight of other novelties and wandered off to inspect them, and presently, Nell returned with a letter from Betty.

"Oh, my dears," she read, "I have such news for you . . . we have a bungalow for the summer, too! It was Gerald did it. He insisted that we close up the apartment and go to the seashore for July and August. So, here we are! And what fun it is! But how I wish you were both here!

"And Gerald has a motor boat, a small one, and he calls it 'The Sea Queen' . . . Chérie will understand . . ."

"And do you?" asked Nell, curiously, looking up from the page, at her cousin's rather puzzled eyes.

"*Mais oui,*" she replied, smiling, as the meaning flashed upon her, "I know . . . it was that day at the beach . . . she took my picture, and only the sea

was with me on the picture . . . so they call me, 'The Sea Queen' . . ."

"Oh, I see," punned Nell, mischievously, "but that doesn't explain why Dr. Gerald Desmond called his boat, 'The Sea Queen' . . . surely, he had something to say about it . . ."

Chérie stared at her cousin in surprise, "*Eh bien,*" she murmured, "the name is pretty . . ."

"Oh, yes, it is pretty," interposed Nell, "and I admire his taste, very much indeed, but . . ." and stopping abruptly, she gave a quick, startled glance toward the door.

Nervously, Chérie turned and followed the direction of her cousin's gaze. What had happened? "Oh, it is Uncle Bob," she exclaimed with relief, recognizing the Brooks' car, with Robert Brooks at the wheel, and replaced the souvenirs, hastily. She could get them any time. And just now a ride back over that hot, dusty road, was not to be despised. "Come, Nell," she went on, "before he drives away! He does not know that we are here . . . hurry . . . call him . . ."

But Nell hung back, and her blue eyes clouded, "I wish to buy some ribbon," she objected, turning away toward the counter.

Chérie was suddenly conscious of a decided feeling of irritation. Why was Nell so obstinate? How changed she was! How unhappy she had made herself, and everyone else in the house! She was carrying this thing too far! What nonsense to act like this with her father!

"*Voilà,* then I go alone," she declared, indignantly, and running to the door she called and waved to Robert Brooks.

Surprised he glanced in, and saw Chérie still gesticulating in the doorway. Was she alone? Where was Nell?

"Is Nell with you?" he asked, peering past her into the store.

"Nell," relayed Chérie, "your father is waiting for you," and there was a note of command in her voice, that stung Nell's pride.

But she obeyed, and followed her cousin out to the car. What was it to Chérie, if she wished to remain? Was she taking sides against her, too? She supposed so. Probably thought she owed that much to Katherine Wolfson. Could no one be relied upon? And during the drive home, she was taciturn, only answering when addressed directly, and then only in monosyllables.

And several times, Chérie glanced at Uncle Bob, his mouth set, his gray eyes staring straight ahead, and her heart ached with a queer little stabbing pain. He was so good, so true! And so was Nell! What a pity this ugly cloud of misunderstanding was between them!

"*Eh bien,*" she thought, gloomily, "I must reason with her, plead with her to consider the harm she is doing . . . before it is too late. I shall risk losing her love . . . but afterwards she shall thank me . . ."

They were at the steps, now. Up on the porch, Katherine Brooks was waiting for them, cool and dainty in her pretty white dress. And most graciously she welcomed them, as if they were guests . . .

But Violet, the colored cook, was not quite so gracious, as the girls passed her, on the way to their room.

"Yo' sho' took yo' time, young ladies, an' the chicken's most spiled," she grumbled, "but Mis' Brooks so easy . . . yo' jest do 'bout as yo' please," and shaking her head at the two delinquents, she watched them out of sight.

All through the meal, Katherine Brooks chatted

pleasantly; and Chérie found herself laughing aloud, once or twice, at the really funny anecdotes she repeated for their benefit.

"Where do you read those stories, Katherine?" asked Uncle Bob.

"Oh, in the magazines," she answered lightly, but her eyes were on Nell, who, with lowered lids, seemed deeply interested in the folding of the napkin she was holding, and in nothing else. With a little catch in her breath, Katherine Brooks arose, and went out upon the porch. She felt disappointed. Again she had been rebuffed. The girl's resentment was as impenetrable as an armor of steel.

And that afternoon, a letter came from the twins, and from it, they learned that Aunt Eliza was again very ill . . . that a doctor went there every day . . .

"I think you ought to go and see her, Robert," suggested his wife, "You are her nearest relative . . . and they seem so alone . . ."

"I suppose it would only be the right thing to do," agreed Robert Brooks, thoughtfully, "and I believe I will . . . I could be back in a day or so . . . a run up to Albany and the Boston train . . . that's all there would be to it . . ."

"Chérie, he never even asked if I wished to go!" complained Nell, a little later. All the petulance she had felt toward her cousin, this morning, was swallowed up in this new grievance against her father; "and he knows Aunt Eliza always wanted me . . ."

Chérie glanced up from the letter, she was writing to Betty. "*Bien sûr*, he knows . . . but you do nothing he wants, Nell," said she, very soberly, "so how would he know that you would care to go? He would rather you had asked to go . . ."

"I shall never do that," declared Nell, raising her head, haughtily, "if he had wanted me to go with him, he would have said so."

Chérie sighed, and she gazed sadly into her cousin's blue eyes. "*Eh bien,* Nell," she whispered, "do not say that. You know how good he is . . . how he loves you."

"How he did love me, you mean," she interrupted, bitterly, "the past tense is preferable in this instance, Chérie."

. . . . .

Night was approaching. The bright hues had receded from the sky, leaving a background of gray, against which the mountains outlined their bulk darkly. Dinner was almost over. Presently the moon would ride majestically above, throwing down the glamour of its silvery light on everything, turning into fairyland the scene without.

"What is it, Amanda?" asked Katherine Brooks, as the girl came toward her, carrying a small silver tray.

"A letter, ma'am," was the answer, "Mr. Bennet was down to the store for his mail, and thought you'd like to have yourn."

"That was very neighborly of Mr. Bennet," commended Robert Brooks, "a little thing like that bolsters up a fellow's faith in human nature, and makes life worth living. . . ."

And the letter was from Madame Travers, and from it they learned that Ma'm'selle had passed to the Great Beyond . . .

"So no more," wrote Madame Travers, "shall we see the dear familiar figure going about, among the flowers and growing things she loved! No more shall our little princess lend her gracious presence to our community . . ."

"*Requiescat in pace,*" murmured Katherine Brooks, and all about the table breathed, "Amen".

"And so the princess is dead," thought Nell, sadly,

"the little old religieuse, whose father was a king, whose mother was a queen . . ."

And back to Nell's mind came the great green lawns of the Sacré Cœur . . . the blue sky . . . the June roses . . . the perfumed air . . . and Ma'm'-selle. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

The Sea Queen

The next day dawned, and the sun was rising in golden splendor, throwing roseate hues across the clouds hanging low about the tops of the mountains. Amanda had set the breakfast table, and wheeled it out on the porch; adding to the novelty of this early meal.

"To-day will be another scorcher," remarked Robert Brooks, in a rather disconsolate tone, "and the heat on the train will be unbearable, but I suppose it is up to me to go. . . ."

"I think it is, Robert," said his wife, "you would regret not going afterwards, perhaps . . . and regrets are unpleasant. . . ."

"Yes, of course . . . but I am sorry . . . I dread the trip!"

"I am also sorry," declared Katherine Brooks, "I am afraid that time will hang heavy on our hands . . ."

Robert Brooks laughed. "Oh, you may as well get used to it . . . my vacation will be ended in a couple of weeks . . . but why not take a trip to the lake! The beach is wonderful, and the girls would enjoy it . . . and it isn't more than fifty miles from here. Take the roadster and your bathing togs . . ."

So it happened, that about noon, Chérie and Nell were standing on the white beach of a most beautiful lake, as blue as the sky above, dashing its waves on the sands at their feet, slowly receding in foamy splotches, making way for the incoming breaker.

"How ceaselessly they come and go," murmured Nell, her eyes on the swelling water, gathering strength for the next attack.

"*Mais oui,* I love so to watch them . . . but I did not think the lake would be like this . . . large like the sea . . ."

"Oh, there are larger lakes than this," said Nell, "but there seems to be plenty of water out there to swim in." And she pulled her green rubber cap down, covering her ears.

"Yes, and in places it is very deep," remarked Katherine Brooks, joining them, taking off her flowered beach coat, and adjusting bright red head covering; "and consequently very dangerous . . . so you must be careful and not be too venturesome . . ."

"I cannot swim, at all," in a regretful voice from Chérie, swinging her cap idly to and fro, "I am afraid to try . . ."

"But you swim?" questioned Mrs. Brooks, turning to Nell, "I have heard your father speak of your expertness in the water."

"Oh, yes," answered Nell, rather carelessly, "Daddy taught me, years ago . . . but it is too shallow here. . . . I am going out on the pier . . . I can dive from there . . ."

"*Non, non,* Nell, not a way out there . . . it is so far from me," and Chérie shivered slightly.

"Oh, don't be such a little goose," chided Nell, "I'll be in no danger . . . I'm a regular fish! You just wade around here, and I'll be with you in no time."

Chérie smiled, but her lips quivered. For some unaccountable reason, she dreaded to lose sight of Nell. So, she slipped her arm within Mrs. Brooks, following Nell out on the pier, vainly striving to appear unconcerned. *Eh bien,* she would not watch her! But as often as she turned away, just so often, her eyes wan-

dered back to Nell's swiftly moving figure, topped with the bright green of her cap.

"Oh," she gasped, when her cousin, posing a brief second, cleft the air, and disappeared in the water below.

And, "Oh," ejaculated Katherine Brooks, admiringly, "what a perfect dive! How graceful she is, Chérie. . . ."

"*Mais oui,* madame," cried Chérie, anxiety in her voice, "I do not see her . . . where is she?"

"She'll be up in a second," answered Katherine Brooks, peering into the blue depths, watching the rings widening out about the spot which had closed over Nell.

"*Hélas,*" wailed Chérie, distressed, "I see her . . . so far out. But look, look, she is not swimming . . . she is there no longer . . . and now I see her again . . ."

Katherine Brooks started violently, glancing keenly in the direction indicated by Chérie.

"Oh," she gasped, "what is wrong?" There, she had disappeared again. Was she drowning?

"Mother of Mercy, save her!" she prayed, diving into the water, without hesitation, and Chérie moaned miserably when she saw her also disappear. Would they both be drowned?

And it seemed ages and ages to Chérie before she saw the red cap reappear, and almost at the same moment, Nell's green cap came into view, for the third and last time.

And the two caps seemed quite close together . . . only a few feet between them . . . but the green cap was disappearing again, and now the red cap was dragging under the water, with the weight of the drowning girl . . .

"Ah, that boat is coming to their rescue," somebody shouted, almost in her ear, and she became con-

scious that a great number of people were watching the dreadful struggle going on before their eyes, with intense excitement and horror.

And almost frantic with fear, Chérie clasped her hands in an agony of feeling, begging *le bon Dieu* to save them both. And through tear-dimmed eyes she saw a small white boat, hiding, for the moment, her dear ones from her view . . . the put-put of the engine never ceasing. . . .

"They've got them," exultantly from those around her, "and it's coming in . . ."

And then for a moment, everything went black, and Chérie staggering forward, helplessly, only the kind hands grasping her, keeping her from falling.

Rallying, she steadied herself, and glanced up. The white boat, panting like a living thing, was nosing its way through the water to the pier, and quite clearly across its bow, she saw the name "Sea Queen," in letters of gold.

. . . . . .

It was a few days later. The rain was coming down in torrents. Robert Brooks had returned the night before from Oldville, leaving Aunt Eliza on the road to recovery. So, only this morning, had he heard about the adventure at the lake. And he stood appalled as he thought of the tragedy that had been averted. . . . Supposing. . . ?

He glanced at his wife and daughter. Neither bore any traces of the ordeal they had passed through, and he thanked God for their deliverance.

"We did not even have a chance to speak to them," Katherine Brooks was saying, "they refused to land, and got away as quickly as possible . . . before I could realize the great debt we owed them, they were beyond reach . . ."

Near noon, Nell and her father found themselves alone, on the porch. The steady drip, drip of the

rain beat on the girl's brain, with a monotony that was maddening. What did her father think of her? Was he angry with her? Did he despise her? Would he ever forgive her?

"Daddy," she began, and the color in her cheeks deepened, "I am so sorry that I resented your marriage so . . . I know now how foolish I was . . . how blinded I was with pride and jealousy . . . I know now how good she is. . . ."

"That is all over, Nell," he interposed, kindly, "and I shall have my little girl, again . . . the Nell who loved me. . . ."

"She risked her life to save me ——"

"She would," he interrupted, with a touch of eager pride, "that is her nature . . . and that is why I expected you to get on so well . . . I thought you admired her, too . . . that you understood her worth. . . ."

The color deepened in Nell's cheeks. "I suppose I did," she admitted, "but when she took Mother's place . . ."

"Not that," he broke in, "no one could do that, Nell . . . no one could crowd from my heart and memory my little lost love . . ."

"Forgive me, Daddy," cried Nell, her lips quivering, the sorrow in his voice awakening afresh the old grief-wounds within her, "I did not mean to hurt you so . . ."

"And Katherine understands," he went on, "she knows . . . she has suffered too. She knows that the gap in her life can never be filled . . . that her little girl has only gone on before her . . . to blaze the way, as it were, to Eternity. . . ."

Nell sighed. "There was something else, Daddy . . . I might as well tell you . . ."

Robert Brooks looked surprised. "What another objection, Nell?"

"Y-y-yes," she stammered, "I thought it was because she had so much money, that you married her . . ."

Robert Brooks laughed. "Well, well, not very complimentary to your old dad, Nell," he chided, "and as a matter of fact you were all wrong. . . ."

"Wrong," she repeated, gazing at him in astonishment.

"Yes . . . she happens to be comparatively poor. . . ."

"I—I—thought Mrs. Wolfson was rich. . . ."

"Mrs. Wolfson was rich," he answered, quietly, "but by the terms of the late Richard Wolfson's will, she forfeited everything but a small annuity, if she married again."

"And she didn't care?"

"No . . . she didn't care! She was tired of Society . . . she wanted a real home and so did I . . . and that's that!"

"And I tried to make the home so miserable," sighed Nell, the tears welling up in the blue eyes.

And just then Chérie came on the porch, a letter in her hand. At a glance, she saw that a reconciliation had taken place between father and daughter. A reconciliation between Nell and Uncle Bob would mean a reconciliation between her and Katherine Brooks. At last, they would be all happy . . . and a prayer of thanks to *le bon Dieu* arose to her lips.

"Ah, here's Chérie," came rather obviously from Robert Brooks, relieved to get away from a subject that had already caused such distress.

"*Bien sûr,* and I come with a letter from Betty . . . and it is all so strange . . . so very, very strange. . . ."

"That you should get a letter from Betty," said Nell, pretending amazement, "what is so strange about that?"

Chérie smiled. Already Nell was changed. All the cold indifference of the past few weeks had dropped from her like a mantle. She was again the eager, fun-loving Nell.

"*Eh bien,* Nell . . . be quiet for one tiny moment, and listen."

"Surely," answered Nell, promptly, "I'm at your service, ma'am."

"About three days ago," read Chérie, "my brother Gerald and his friend were out in the motor boat, and went across the lake. And quite a distance up, on the other side, they met with a very thrilling adventure . . . they saved a girl and her mother from drowning . . ."

Nell's eyes opened wide. Could it be possible? But Uncle Bob laughed, skeptically, "People are saved from drowning every day," he told them, "so don't jump at conclusions . . . only to be disappointed."

"This is no conclusion, Uncle Bob," Chérie declared, "I saw the name on the boat. . . ."

"And what was it, Chérie?" asked Nell, eagerly.

"The 'Sea Queen' was in large gold letters across the front of the boat . . . and Gerald's boat is named . . ."

"'Sea Queen,'" finished Nell, triumphantly, "so it must have been Betty's brother saved us. . . ."

"And his friend," added Katherine Brooks, from the doorway, "do not forget the friend . . . we needed them both, that day."

Nell sprang impulsively to her feet, and approached the older woman, her eyes misty with unshed tears. "But their help would have come too late, if it hadn't been for you, dear," she said, shyly. "I owe my life to you!"

She had conquered herself . . . she had humbled herself . . . she had acknowledged that she had been at fault. . . .

Katherine Brooks' startled gaze rested on the girl who had so resented her, and a wonderful light sprang into her dark eyes. "Dear child," she murmured, drawing Nell close, and kissing her, and glancing up she met her husband's eyes. A smile parted her sweet lips. Katherine Brooks was happy! *She had won Nell's love and trust!*

"*Voilà!*" cried Chérie, suddenly, her outstretched arm, pointing, her dark eyes shining with delight; "*l'arc-en-ciel!*"

And startled, they followed with their eyes the direction of her gaze.

Across the sky a rainbow had formed; the brilliant colors reaching from mountain top to mountain top. The rain had ceased. A white mist was rising from the sodden earth. The sun's rays were gilding the tops of the trees, turning into diamonds the clinging raindrops, lifting the drooping heads of the drenched flowers, drying their tears that they might again gladden the land.

"Well, that means that the storm is over," and a great happiness was in Robert Brooks' eyes, "and that we are in for some nice weather. . . . Isn't that the way it looks to you, Chérie?"

"*Bien sûr,*" returned Chérie, smiling, "what else could it be . . . and the promise of *le bon Dieu* in the sky?"

THE END

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